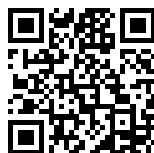

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WHEN LOVE IS STRONG



By Grace Wallace DOONAN

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April 7th 1908.

“WHEN LOVE IS STRONG”

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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“When Love is Strong”

BY

GRACE KEON

**AUTHOR OF “THE RULER OF THE KINGDOM”
“NOT A JUDGMENT —” ETC.**

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

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“WHEN LOVE IS STRONG”

“When love is strong,
It never tarries to take heed,
Or know if its return exceed
Its gift.”

— HELEN HUNT.

CHAPTER I

THE SAPPHIRE CUFF BUTTON

A YOUNG man ran lightly up the steps, and a stout servant, in handsome, dark-green livery, with a row of shining buttons on his coat, held out a salver for the visitor's card.

The young man's eyes twinkled with something very much like amusement.

“Give this to Mr. Wentworth. Be sure it is *Mr.* Wentworth,” he said.

The butler bowed, and with stately air moved past the drawing-room, whence issued the sound of musical voices, the swish of silken skirts, and the tinkle of china.

“Struck Aunt Joan's at-home day — what luck!”

The Sapphire Cuff Button

muttered the young fellow to himself with a shrug. "Well, it would be a shame to disturb her. By George, it's worth while being called a barbarian to avoid that lorgnette. I never could stand a lorgnette — and hers is the awfulest of the tribe. And this article, with its silver buttons and its powdered hair — I suppose this is Aunt Joan's latest."

He was unconscious of the expression on his handsome face as he watched the slow and dignified progress of the man coming up the hall toward him.

"Mr. Wentworth will see you, sir," said the servant, very politely, but he had flushed a little under the amused scrutiny of the visitor.

"After all, he can't help it," ruminated Donald Mackenzie, following the green uniform. "He's got his living to make. But with a pair of legs like that he ought to go into business for himself — he really ought. Hello, Uncle William!"

The green uniform disappeared. With a smile of pleasure the young man extended both hands to the white-haired gentleman who stood in the center of the room — a perturbed expression ruffling his usually placid countenance.

"Hello, my lad — hello, glad to see you, glad to see you!" he cried, in tones of unmistakable good will. "Come right in, lad, and shut the door — or we'll have some of Joan's people 'bearding the lion in his den,' as one woman told me last week when she came to me on a begging expedition. You've grown, haven't you?"

The Sapphire Cuff Button

looking at him with critical eyes. "Improved you wonderfully, this last year abroad. A year! It's two years! Two years! I tell you, Don, time does fly, doesn't it? When did you get here? How long are you in the city?"

"About a month," said Donald, with some hesitation.

"A month? H'm! Where have you been in the month, eh? What kept you so long? Got a letter from John only this morning — and he doesn't say a word about you. What do you mean by not coming here sooner?"

"Well," said Donald, stiffening a little at the peremptory tone, "I had some business to finish that required all my attention, and until it was off my hands I couldn't think of anything or any one else. Uncle John doesn't know I'm here any more than you did — though I'm going to Wentworth the end of the week."

"Umph — well — that's all right, then. Business, you say? Business?" The old man was plainly pre-occupied.

"I thought I'd run in on you and find out how you were," said Donald.

"Thank you," said William Wentworth, looking with abstracted eyes past him. "Oh, hang it, Don — sit down and let me tell you something. I'm in serious trouble."

"Serious trouble?" questioned Donald, as if he could scarcely believe his ears. "Why, Uncle William, that's too bad."

The Sapphire Cuff Button

"Too bad!" repeated William Wentworth. "You have no idea how bad it really is. Do you know what happened at the —th National on Monday night? Do you?" His voice sank to a whisper. "Two hundred thousand in currency abstracted from the vault, and not a hair's breadth out of the way to prove who took it! Not a lock disturbed, nor a thing displaced. What do you say to that for a nice piece of work?"

"Two hundred thousand!" cried Donald. "Great Scott!"

He gazed at the old gentleman in bewilderment.

"The money," said William Wentworth, "is enough to lose just now. I've been investing pretty heavily of late, and the putting of it back will cripple me badly — but back it has to go," with a grim look. "What puzzles me is the way of it. You see —"

"Mr. Knox!" announced the butler. They had not heard his knock, and his voice, breaking in on the conversation, made the old man start, and frown in annoyance. But he turned expectantly.

"Ah, how do you do, Knox?" to the shrewd-looking little man who immediately entered the room. "Right on time, I see. This is Donald Mackenzie, Mr. Knox. He's just happened along — and being a close-mouthed, clever young fellow, why, we'll keep him here. Perhaps he can aid us with a theory or two."

"Theories?" The newcomer smiled, somewhat disagreeably, Donald thought, and bent a pair of piercing gray eyes upon him — eyes that Donald, unfavorably

The Sapphire Cuff Button

impressed, met with a cold stare. "Is he acquainted with Mr. Wyndon?"

"No," said William Wentworth. His face clouded.

"Then, perhaps — he being neither one of the profession like myself, nor prejudiced in Wyndon's favor, as —" He broke off suddenly.

"As I am," finished Wentworth. "Go on. Don't be afraid to say it."

"As you are," went on the detective, coolly. "Yes. I meant that. Perhaps you'll listen to his unbiased opinion, then?"

"I — may," said Wentworth. "Hang it! There are reasons why —"

He, too, ceased abruptly. Donald glanced from one to the other without a word.

"Mr. Wyndon!" said the butler. Keenly interested now, Donald looked up. A pale-faced, fair man came in hesitatingly — a good-looking man, thought Donald Mackenzie. His was a tired countenance, though, and there was a droop to the mouth half hidden under the long mustache, and lines between the eyes that spoke of a troubled mind. A troubled mind, indeed, but not a guilty one. William Wentworth held out his hand to him.

"How do you do, George?" he said heartily. "Come over here, and find yourself a chair. You're not looking well."

"I haven't slept much these past two nights," confessed the man, with a faint smile. "Sleep is hardly possible under circumstances such —"

The Sapphire Cuff Button

The words died on his lips as he saw Donald.

"Oh, that's all right," said William Wentworth. "Mr. Mackenzie, Mr. Wyndon. A friend, George — perhaps he can help us out, and we need all the light we can get. It's no joke to lose a sum of money as large as we have lost — and not a trace to show where it vanished —"

"It's far from being anything like a joke to me," said Wyndon, with a ghastly smile. Donald, looking at him, could well believe it. "I've been with you twenty-five years, Mr. Wentworth. You know, sir, that what should exact fidelity from other men — long service, kindness, generosity — has gone deeper with me. I could not betray any trust reposed in me by you unless I were the veriest cur —"

He was standing behind a chair, his hand leaning on it. Emotion choked him; he could not complete the sentence. William Wentworth was visibly touched.

"You stop right there," he said. "I've known you too long, Wyndon, to let suspicion enter my mind where you are concerned. I can't imagine how the money was taken — but you haven't taken it. I'll stake every cent I possess on that. And seeing that I am bearing the loss is pretty good evidence that I believe in you."

Tears were in the man's eyes.

"Thank you, sir," he returned, "thank you. I knew you would say that, and it makes me feel better. But other people — The suspicion is there just the

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same — and it means disgrace. It will be said you put the money back for my sake —”

“Don’t be a fool!” said William Wentworth, roughly, and then there was silence. The calm voice of Knox broke it:

“Every man is innocent until he’s proven guilty,” he said. “It doesn’t hurt any one to take that view. Nevertheless there are some facts which have to be considered. Will we run over them now?”

He looked inquiringly at Mr. Wentworth.

“Sit down, Wyndon, for heaven’s sake — you irritate me standing up there. That’s better. Yes, go over the facts, if you please, Knox. Donald hasn’t heard any of them yet. As for George and me — well, we know them only too thoroughly.”

“On Monday of this week,” began Knox, in a calm voice, “there was consigned to the —th National from the Treasury at Washington two hundred thousand dollars in bills, with about three thousand dollars of this sum in gold and silver coin. This money arrived safely at the private office of the President, Mr. William Wentworth. Here the guard turned it over to that gentleman, and the teller of the bank, Mr. George Wyndon.”

He paused.

“So far, so good,” said Mr. Wentworth.

“This money was placed in the vault of the bank by the teller himself. There was a meeting of the directors called for the following night. On Tuesday morning, when the vault was opened, the money had

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completely disappeared — all of it except the few odd thousands in coin which the thieves — or thief — evidently considered too heavy to carry off. Am I right?"

"Perfectly," said William Wentworth. Wyndon nodded. Knox leaned forward in his chair, and Donald, despite his interest in the tale, found himself marveling at the shrewdness of that thin face, with its sensitive nostrils. It was the face of a man with a purpose.

"Now listen. Mr. Wyndon was seen walking past the bank between ten and eleven o'clock Monday evening. The man who passed him recognized him, spoke to him, but received no answer. Mr. Wyndon paused under an electric light to adjust his cuff. It was noticed that he carried a bundle on his arm — that he transferred this bundle to the other arm to —"

Wyndon, staring at him as if he had gone mad, now bounded from his chair.

"I?" he burst forth, fairly shouting the words. "I did all this? At half-past seven on Monday evening, directly after my supper, I went to bed with a blinding headache. That generally means a bad night, as you know," he said, appealing to William Wentworth, who nodded affirmatively. "But you will remember, sir, I commented on the fact that I fell asleep almost immediately?"

Knox made a peculiar, clucking sound.

"The man who paused under the electric light to adjust the cuff of which I have spoken, dropped something

The Sapphire Cuff Button

that seemed to roll away from him. He bent to look for it. Without success. Yet I have found it. Come, now. There is still the chance left you, Wyndon; why not throw yourself on Mr. Wentworth's mercy?"

But Wyndon, with an expression of utter despair, of bewilderment so complete in his face as to denote that his wits were wandering, could only shake his head.

"I tell you, man, I found what you lost," said Knox, in his impassive manner. "Would you like to look at it?"

He extended his hand, palm upward. His face was flushed and a gleam of triumph shone upon it. Resting on his hand was a cuff button of quaint design, being a handsome sapphire set in reddish gold. Wyndon bent forward with white face. So did Mr. Wentworth, eagerly. Donald also. Then Donald gave a muttered exclamation.

"That's mine," he said.

Knox's fingers closed tightly over the button. He drew back his hand, looking at Donald almost haughtily.

"That's mine," repeated the young man. "Wait — I have the fellow to it." He fumbled in his vest pocket — then drawing out a similar button, he held it up between his thumb and forefinger. "You'll see, by comparing them, that they're exactly alike. I lost that one a few days ago, and it was to ask Mr. Wentworth's aid in tracing it — seeing that I had to leave the city in a few days — that brought me here. Where did you find it?"

The Sapphire Cuff Button

"On the corner of Fifth Avenue and —th Street."

"Fifth Avenue and —th Street?" echoed Donald.

"Yes; I passed there Monday — in the afternoon, I think. I'm positive I didn't lose it then. But wait. I might have —"

He paused, wrinkling his forehead.

"Did I have them after that? Let me see. Perhaps —"

"I never owned a cuff button of that sort," said Wyndon now.

"I don't believe there's another pair like them in the world," said Donald, confidently. "They were my father's — the only thing I have of value in the jewelry line."

"We are getting off the track," said William Wentworth, a little sourly. "You came here to enlighten me as to who stole my two hundred thousand dollars — not to find lost cuff buttons, Knox."

Knox compressed his thin lips. He was flushed and angry. The triumph had died out of his face, and Donald noticed the inflation of his nostrils.

"When your teller is seen in the vicinity of your bank at a questionable hour —"

"Who saw him?"

"A man who is his friend — a man who is indebted to him, I believe, for his position, a man whom I almost forced to speak — the night watchman, James Byrd."

"Byrd saw me?" broke in Wyndon, "Byrd says he saw me —"

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"Byrd — who is Byrd?" interrupted Wentworth, half contemptuously. "Wyndon, were you there?"

"On my word of honor — as I hope for heaven — as I trust in God Almighty, Mr. Wentworth, I was not there!"

"I believe you — there's my hand on it. I don't know Byrd — except that he was given his position on your recommendation, and I do know you. I couldn't suspect you of this any more than I could myself. Knox —"

"Yes?"

"You know how essential it is to keep this thing quiet. Does your man Byrd know why you questioned him?"

"He has a suspicion of something wrong — he does not know anything."

"Keep him so. The money has been replaced. There is no one the loser but President Wentworth." His white mustache curved upward at one side and he smiled in a sarcastic fashion. "The day you bring definite, positive proof as to who stole this money and as to how it was done, whether it is recovered or not, that day I'll give you ten thousand dollars into your hand. And I'll provide for it in case I die before you discover the truth," grimly. "Here are two gentlemen to prove it — and I guess William Wentworth's word is as good as any man's."

"Better than the bond of most men," said Knox. His eyes were glistening.

The Sapphire Cuff Button

"So; call on me for expenses and go ahead. Let me hear nothing more about it until you are *sure* — and for heaven's sake don't be arraigning my oldest and best friends before me on suspicion. I can't stand that. Wyndon!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Don't you go away from here with the remotest idea that I imagine you mixed up in this affair. It's an ugly thing — that I know. But it will come out all right, with you on the top of the heap. Don't fret, old chap," shaking hands with him and looking at him almost affectionately. "We'll forget it for the time being. That's all just now, gentlemen."

He stood up with a determined air. Knox and Wyndon felt themselves dismissed. They went out together — the old gentleman staring after them. When the door closed behind them he shook his head.

"That Knox is a human bloodhound," he said, with what sounded very much like a chuckle. "He'll never let go until he has the guilty man in his hands. Queer thing how he found that button, isn't it, Don?"

"Did you ever hear a stranger thing?" asked Donald. "I can hardly believe it. You see, I wanted to go home Saturday — day after to-morrow, and I came intending to ask you to take this other one and reward the finder if the button turned up."

"When did you lose it — Monday?"

"Sometime Monday, I think."

"And to-day is Thursday! H'm! You must have

The Sapphire Cuff Button

been pretty anxious to get it back. Why didn't you advertise it?"

"Couldn't. Didn't have time — or at least my time was not my own."

"Not your own! Whose was it, then?"

"My employer's. It expired to-day at noon. You see me at four o'clock. I don't think I was so very remiss, was I, Uncle William?"

"Oh, you are one of those punctilious fellows —"

"Always was."

"You've got your cuff button safe for your pains. Case of the good boy rewarded. Let's throw aside business now, Don. Heard from Dolly lately?"

"Not in over two months. Her last letter reached me before I left the other side."

"Little minx. She was here, you know."

"Here? Staying here?"

"Yes. Came on for a visit." He laughed silently.

"Donald, I know the language of a bank president is open to criticism, but between you and me, boy, she made Joan sit up and take notice. She did that. Joan had never seen her since she was ten years old, and when she came — Phew! you ought to have seen Joan!"

"Dolly surprised her?" There was a gratified expression on Donald's face.

"Surprised her? Joan was going to draw things lightly — thought she was some gawky country girl. Didn't the invitations fly out after she got a good look at her! It was as good as any play I ever went to. She

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stood it for about two weeks — Dolly did, I mean. Then one day she kicked over the traces and bolted.”

“You mean —”

“She couldn’t stomach society. It was too much for her. So she packed up and went off without a bit of fuss. Joan — well, Joan mustn’t have been pleasant company for a while. I didn’t see much of her — I didn’t dare to. I respect Joan highly when anything like that happens. Tell you what, John has brought up his bit lassie used to having her own way.”

“It’s a good way, Uncle William,” said Donald.

“It’s a very good way. I wish I had a daughter like that same Miss Dolly.”

“She has a sensible mother. It is Aunt Claudia who has made her so self-reliant, I think,” said Donald, quietly. “And Dolly — I don’t think any one could spoil Dolly.”

“An arrant little Papist,” said Uncle William.

“I am one of the despised tribe, also,” returned Donald.

“Yes — I had forgotten. Well, the religion’s all right. I haven’t a word against the religion. Only Joan thinks it’s nonsense.”

“Aunt Claudia doesn’t — or Uncle John. They’re very good Catholics.”

“I can’t imagine John going to church. He never went when we were boys together. As for me — I don’t know what the inside of a church is like.”

“Strange how good some people can be in spite of themselves!”

The Sapphire Cuff Button

"What's that — an insult or a compliment? Never mind. I won't quarrel with you after not having had a good look at you in two years. Tell Dolly she's won her old uncle's heart — and that's the truth. Perhaps I'll go to visit John some day."

"Nothing would please him better."

"We'll find out. Going?" as Donald rose. "Come in again before you start. I want to send Dolly a little remembrance."

"To-morrow about this time — you'll be home then?" Donald shook hands. "Don't say anything to Mrs. Wentworth, will you? She'll never forgive me for not stopping at the drawing-room first. But I don't like that sort of thing. You understand?"

"Perfectly. Dolly and you are well matched," smiling, with a look that sent the blood to the young man's dark forehead. "What's the matter? Why are you reddening? After two years abroad! You'll always be a schoolboy, Donald. Well, good-by. I must twist my mind back to this robbery business. It's a relief to have forgotten it for a while, and you've helped me. Good-by—until to-morrow." He turned away, then as suddenly turned back again. "Er—Donald?"

"Yes, sir?"

"What do you think of Wyndon?"

"I was not prepossessed in his favor when he came in," said Donald, slowly. "But the longer I looked at him the better I liked him. He struck me as being an honest chap, Uncle William."

The Sapphire Cuff Button

"I'm glad to hear you say that. It's pretty bad, you know. He's been with me twenty-five years. I'd rather lose the money than —" He paused, very much flurried.

"I understand," said Donald.

"Oh, you do?" testily. "Well, I wish I did."

"It will come out all right with Knox, as you said," returned Donald, smiling. "I wouldn't want a man with a nose like his to get after me if I had done anything wrong."

"Whoever is guilty has to suffer," said William Wentworth, grimly. "I wouldn't save my own brother if he committed a crime of that sort. It's the principle of the thing."

"Yes," said Donald. "But you'll find out he isn't guilty — and then there's that night watchman — he may know more than he has chosen to tell. Poor Wyndon! He looks done up."

"I noticed that. It'll kill him, I suppose, if it isn't settled quickly. Well, good-by again, Don."

"Good-by, Uncle William."

CHAPTER II

"FELIX DUNBAR"

DONALD MACKENZIE breathed more freely when he found himself safe on the sidewalk without encountering the lady of the house. Like "Uncle William," he respected her very much — but in spite of this respect his breach of courtesy did not affect him now to his discomfort. He had no desire to be viewed through the lorgnette he scorned — a thing remembered of old — or be given the tips of her dainty fingers in greeting after she had inspected him. In fact the story just imparted to him by William Wentworth had filled him with a sort of jubilation. He felt happy — pleased with himself, and with every one, and especially with a certain little maid who "could not stomach society," as her uncle termed it, and who had managed to put distance between it and herself so soon. Being in this pleasant mood he wasn't sorry to meet Mr. Knox on the corner — rather glad, indeed, when that gentleman offered to walk with him to his hotel.

"You intend staying in the city?" asked the detective.

"Until Saturday — day after to-morrow," returned Donald.

"Felix Dunbar"

"Going anywhere this evening?"

"No. I might go to a theater."

"Come with me. I have two seats for the Criterion. There's a good play on."

"I should be delighted. Thank you."

They walked on a half block in silence.

"Where did you leave Wyndon?" asked Donald.

"He left me. He hasn't much affection for me."

"Well, now! You can't blame him! If he were guilty he might be a bit anxious to propitiate you. As he isn't guilty —"

"Oh, but he is guilty," in a confident voice. "There isn't any one else."

"There might be a dozen others."

"Might is a big word. It's between the President of the bank and George Wyndon."

"How about the watchman?"

"I'm not telling all I know. The watchman can not be suspected. Wyndon can and is. I'll bet you, Mr. Mackenzie, that he'll write a confession of his crime to Mr. Wentworth before the week is over. I have him just where I want him."

"You thought you had him with my cuff button," said Donald. "Personally, I consider the man innocent — but that, of course, is only an impression."

Knox shrugged his shoulders.

"Impressions don't count in a court of law."

"Impressions of false keys might," said Donald, in the same dry tone. "And as for combinations — I've

"Felix Dunbar"

heard that safe companies employ reformed cracksmen to open anything that defies their mechanics. I, myself, while I am neither a reformed crook nor a mechanical expert, would like to see the combination I couldn't solve in thirty minutes!"

"Now you're talking big," said Knox.

"It may sound so," said Donald, quietly. "Therefore we won't dwell on the subject. The prospects look black for poor Wyndon — and I've always been on the weaker side. I hate to see anything human fighting against bad odds."

To this Knox made no reply. He was a practical man, and his business did not admit a shred of sentiment. He thought Donald Mackenzie one of a piece with his relative, who so stoutly asserted a guilty man's innocence. For, in Knox's mind, Wyndon was already tried and convicted. He parted from Donald without saying any more either way, promising to call for him an hour later.

The piece on the boards was a popular one, and the house, when Knox and Donald arrived there, fully crowded. They settled themselves comfortably in one of the boxes on the upper row, and were talking of the theater and of the different actresses of the day, when Donald, who was facing the curtain, while Knox had his back to it, saw the detective's eyebrows go up.

"Don't move," said the latter, in a low voice. "Stay just as you are and he won't notice me. Wyndon is behind you. If he sees us he'll think I am following him. That may be necessary after a while — but he

"Felix Dunbar"

needn't borrow trouble." He grinned and twisted in his chair so that the back of his head and one ear only were visible.

Donald sat perfectly quiet. After a while he heard the bustle of another entrance into the next box. The newcomer advanced to the front row of chairs, and Donald, turning his face and looking out of the corner of one eye, observed that he was a very handsome man, with brown hair and finely cut features.

Even as Donald looked at him he saw him rise and bow to a lady on the other side of the house — an exquisitely gowned woman, who smiled and waved her fan in response. Donald could not see her face, but he noticed her vivacious manner. There were a number of people with her, but she seemed to absorb all the attention. Then the house began to darken. The overture was finished, and the orchestra had begun the soft music preliminary to the rise of the curtain. Suddenly the lights went out and the play started.

There was a movement in the box that Wyndon occupied. Donald tilted his chair a little. Some impulse made him turn his head. He saw the handsome stranger bend carelessly backward, and putting out his hand, lay it upon both of George Wyndon's, which were crossed over the chair in front of him.

With every nerve strained now, Donald waited. Suddenly there fell on his ears a sound — scarcely more audible than a long breath.

"Forget," said the stranger.

"Felix Dunbar"

Again silence, and again Donald waited for he knew not what. The answer came in a muffled voice, from George Wyndon.

"Forget," he whispered.

"There is no such person as Felix Dunbar."

"There — is — no — such — person — as — Felix — Dunbar."

"He did not accompany you to the —th National Monday night."

Slowly the words were repeated by Wyndon.

"You will forget?"

"I — will — forget."

That was all. Donald felt as if he were in a dream, but his face remained expressionless. Knox turned suspiciously once—and looked into the next box. But Wyndon was in the shadow and Donald's body hid his hands. The detective gave his attention to the play again.

The first act ended. When the lights flared up, Donald, regardless of the detective's warning, turned around deliberately. There was nobody in the box but George Wyndon. He, seeing Donald, recognized him and half smiled—as if not knowing whether the acquaintanceship would be acknowledged.

Donald spoke first.

"How do you do?" he said, cordially enough.

"How do you do?" returned Wyndon. "I thought that finale pretty fine."

"Rather," said Donald. "Your friend must have spoiled it a little for you." He spoke meaningly.

“Felix Dunbar”

“My friend?” asked Wyndon, in a questioning tone. Knox, his sharp eyes twinkling, leaned forward from behind Donald, and Wyndon saw him for the first time. His whole form stiffened.

“Mr. Knox, you mean?” curtly. “Mr. Knox is no friend of mine.”

Donald smiled sarcastically. He could well believe that in the light of this past few moments. He had thought the man the victim of a hideous mistake, but now this aspect of injured innocence was too much.

“No use quarreling about it,” he said, at last. “We’re here to enjoy ourselves. Do you know who that lady opposite might be?”

“That?” George Wyndon’s eyes followed his nod. “Oh, that is Mrs. Montresor — one of New York’s society women.”

“Mrs. Montresor!” Donald knew the name well, though he had never met the possessor of it. “The famous Mrs. Montresor?”

“Yes,” said George Wyndon. He hesitated a little. “She is a handsome woman, isn’t she, Mr. Mackenzie?”

“From here — very handsome,” said Donald. “Very handsome, indeed.”

“Yet Mr. Wentworth’s niece, Miss Dorothy — I met Miss Dorothy while she was visiting — before this trouble —” He paused.

“You met her?” asked Donald, kindly. “My home is with Miss Wentworth’s people — we are like sister and brother.”

"Felix Dunbar"

"Is that a fact?" asked Wyndon. His face lit up. "She's a wonderful girl, Mr. Mackenzie. There's not another like her in the world. Everybody thought so. Only Mrs. Montresor. She didn't. There was quite some talk in the society papers."

"Heavens! No wonder Dolly didn't like the atmosphere!" thought Donald to himself. "Imagine good John Wentworth's daughter being brought out for inspection — among that sort," eyeing the fashionably dressed people in the opposite box with disfavor on his dark face. Aloud, he said carelessly:

"I reckon Miss Dorothy could hold her own."

Wyndon smiled. Knox, although an interested listener, was forgotten by both men for the time being.

"You should have been here. I met her several times — she came to my home to see my daughter Beatrice," he went on, with the garrulousness of one who has felt himself under a cloud, and who is relieved a little by courtesy from an unexpected quarter. "It's two months since she went back — and she was only in the city two weeks. But no one will forget her in a hurry. Mrs. Montresor won't, at any rate."

Donald did not answer. The second act was beginning, and as he had missed some of the first listening to the peculiar conversation in the next box, he gave the stage all his attention. Despite the fact that he was a little homesick just then, and anxious to come in touch with those who knew or had seen any of his home people, he felt that Dorothy Wentworth was too sacred a subject to

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discuss with a man like George Wyndon. Nevertheless, he meant to seek an interview with him, and to tell him what he had overheard, so as to let Wyndon know that his deception must be brought to a close. He did not wish to be hard on the man, but William Wentworth was Dolly's uncle and too honest and too trusting to be longer deceived. It would be a hard wrench, but what of that? Men have had confidence in one another and been betrayed before this. The old gentleman would get over it. So ran Donald's thoughts.

When the play was ended the three men went out together. Knox had not spoken more than once or twice to Donald since the latter held speech with Wyndon. Now, at the door, he excused himself — nor did Donald notice the expression on his face as he left them — for he was not thinking of Knox just then, and was glad to see him go, if anything. Wyndon and the young man walked down the avenue.

“A fine little play altogether, wasn't it?” asked Wyndon.

“Yes,” said Donald, absently. He gave a deep breath. “Look here, Wyndon. Mr. Wentworth asked me what I thought of you to-day. And I told him. I said I considered you an innocent man. He thinks so, too.”

“Thank you,” said Wyndon. The temporary relief occasioned by the play, by Donald's cordiality, by the brightness of his surroundings, left his face, showing it white again and creased with lines that were sorrowful

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and anxious. “If you only knew how I could bless you for that! I haven’t had much luck in my life, Mr. Mackenzie — excepting Mr. Wentworth’s friendship. I was just married when we became acquainted first. I was only twenty-two then. After the birth of my little girl my wife took ill. She’s been an invalid ever since. Mr. Wentworth has been more than kind to me — and the only return I could make him was faithfulness. God knows I did my best to give him that — every minute of the day,” he went on, earnestly. “My little girl, Beatrice, has never seen her mother’s face. She’s twenty-four now — but a child still. She has been a child always, with the sweetness of soul God gives, I think, to every one born blind.”

“Blind!” echoed Donald. “How pitiable!”

“No,” said Wyndon, slowly. “It is not pitiable. Miss Dorothy thought it was at first — but not after she saw Beatrice. Her name means blessedness, and she has been a blessing indeed.” He spoke dreamily, and Donald knew his thoughts were with that beloved one. “Perhaps you can realize what I meant this afternoon; not for all the wealth of this world would I bring disgrace upon those two — my wife and daughter. They are helpless enough, both of them — but in their helplessness is my strength.”

He spoke, seemingly, from the bottom of his heart. Donald paused.

“In the name of God, man,” he said, “what does it all mean? Who was the stranger who came into

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your box after you to-night? Explain that if you can. I heard every word he said to you.”

Wyndon looked him straight in the eyes. His expression was that of a man completely at sea. There was no guilt on his face — only wonder. And the young man marveled.

“I saw nobody to-night. I do not know what you are talking about.”

Donald threw his hand out with a gesture of impatience.

“Who is Felix Dunbar?”

“Felix Dunbar?” echoed Wyndon. “Dunbar? I never heard the name.”

“What folly!” said Donald, thoroughly angry now. “Do I look like a fool, man, or an idiot? I tell you I heard every word he said to you! Shall I repeat them?”

There was growing bewilderment on Wyndon’s face. He nodded his head weakly, staring at Donald with his wide, pale-blue eyes.

“He put his hand across yours — so. He looked at you. He said, ‘Forget.’ You repeated it. He said, ‘There is no such person as Felix Dunbar.’ Word for word you echoed him. ‘He did not accompany you to the —th National Monday night.’ You repeated this also. He went on, ‘You will forget?’ You said, ‘I will forget.’ There! You see I heard every word. What is the use of denying it to me?”

Wyndon released his hand from the young man’s energetic clasp, and passed it over his forehead wearily.

“I don’t know what you are talking about, Mr.

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Mackenzie. I have no recollection of any such conversation — I have seen no such man. There's something wrong, somewhere — I can't understand it," he went on, in a tired voice. "It seems to me I shouldn't try to understand it. It is as if I were living in a nightmare, and these accusations weigh on me like horrid phantoms that I can not grasp — that are not tangible — not tangible." His voice was that of one in intense pain. "Between you and Mr. Knox you'll doubtless prove a very good case. Go ahead and prove it," he burst forth, then, suddenly, and with a flash of anger that startled the puzzled listener, "Go ahead and prove it! But when you have killed my wife and broken my child's heart, and brought shame and disgrace upon me, you will come to ask my forgiveness when the guilty person is discovered. God deal with you as you deal with me. That's all. I have the honor of bidding you good-night."

He turned on his heel, and the darkness of the side street swallowed his rapidly retreating figure. Donald stood looking after him, his brows knitted, his lips set — reason fighting with the instinct that said this man was innocent. He stood there a few minutes, pondering, seeking light, trying in every way to solve this intricate problem. Some one coming up behind him tapped him on the arm. It was Knox.

"Hello!" he said. "We meet again. You not home yet? Where's Wyndon?"

"Walking faster than I am," said Donald.

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"You don't look extra comfortable," said the detective.

"I don't feel extra comfortable," said Donald. "I feel very much like turning detective myself — cheating you at your own game, Knox. That would be funny, wouldn't it?"

"Very," said Knox, in a dry tone.

"Take a tip from me and steer clear of the Wyndon trail. Go abroad, my dear sir. Look farther afield. In fact, thou intricate searcher into ways winding and devious, find out who Felix Dunbar is."

Knox did not relish this pleasantry — for sarcasm was ever in the second twist of Donald Mackenzie's tongue.

"Felix Dunbar? Where did you hear the name?"

"You are not asking me the how or wherefore — for I don't know. Let Wyndon alone — until the net tightens a little. Get after Felix Dunbar, Mr. Knox, whoever Felix Dunbar may be."

Knox's eyes narrowed suddenly. He gave his companion a sharp glance.

"Seems queer you only heard about this case to-day and can get information when no one else has a chance."

"To him that hath shall be given," said Donald, lightly.

"I'm not a rich man, Mr. Mackenzie," went on the detective, "and that reward Mr. Wentworth offered would make a handsome nest egg. Anything you can tell me will be received gratefully."

"You haven't an invalid wife nor a blind daughter

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to be provided for, have you?" asked Donald. "No, don't tell me if you have — I couldn't stand any more to-night. This is my hotel. Seriously speaking, I can give you no further hint. You should be grateful for what you have received at my hands. Don't forget the name — Felix Dunbar. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Knox, reluctantly. "Good-night."

There was something very much like suspicion in his keen eyes. But then suspicion is the detective's stock in trade. He gave no indication of his thoughts — simply puzzled over them in the manner habitual to him.

"Well," he said, at last, "it's about time for me to turn in. But it's queer."

He quickened his pace a little.

"Very queer."

He shook his head, tugging a little at his chin.

"Who is he? What relation? Where did he come from? When did he come? That cuff button, too. Well, we'll see."

He went home, then, and went to bed.

CHAPTER III

AT WENTWORTH

It was a little room — one would say, without a moment's hesitation, that it was a man's room, with everything for use and very little for ornament. No ornament at all, indeed, save a beautiful picture of the Mother of Sorrows on the wall above the desk, and the laughing face of a girl, set in a silver frame, resting on the desk itself.

Professor Wentworth was a noted entomologist, — an authority on the subject, and he was engrossed now in the study of a certain Western wheat bug. Microscopes and queer little glass cups were arranged before him. A book lay open at one elbow, and at the other was a sheet of paper on which he had been penciling his observations.

He came to himself with a great start, realizing suddenly that some one was knocking at the door. It seemed to him, as he rose to open it, that he had heard that sound for a long time without being fully conscious of it. He turned the key with a guilty feeling. A little woman, plump and fair and young-looking, entered. She was frowning.

"Dear me, John!" she said, in an irritated voice.

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"Are you growing deaf? I have been knocking five minutes?"

"Yes," he answered absently. "I just heard you."

She looked aggrieved. His eyes sought his desk and he made a quick dart forward, putting a glass cup cover over a little dark object crawling rapidly along its surface. Mrs. Wentworth picked up her skirts.

"Good gracious!" she said apprehensively. "You are so careless, John. How many of those things get away from you in a day?"

"None," said John Wentworth. "They're too precious. This is a lively chap — he wants a sniff from the chloroform bottle. You — er — you were knocking, Claudia?"

"Yes, I was knocking. You've seen that animal Dorothy has outside on the road, haven't you? How any father could be so careless —"

"But, Claudia —"

"If you had been standing on that porch watching them this last fifteen minutes, John, you'd feel a little more concern. What possessed you to buy that creature?"

"Claudia, I —"

"Come; see for yourself! And you would trust Dorothy on the back of such an ugly — Oh, John, I have no patience with you!"

She left the room hurriedly and he stood looking after her, a half smile on his parted lips. None knew better than he how short-lived his wife's little fits of temper

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were. He straightened the books on his desk, put a weight on the paper and pulled his glasses down from his forehead. Such a great, white forehead it was, and such kindly eyes as the heavy eyebrows sheltered — kindly eyes, with a straight, powerful nose beneath them, and firm lips. Wrinkles there were in plenty, each one the mark of a noble, gentle, humorous disposition. They called him, indeed, “the good John Wentworth,” and whether or no he deserved the title, let this story prove.

As he closed the door behind him and followed his wife out upon the broad porch, a burst of girlish laughter saluted his ear. Even at the sound of it a responsive smile curved his mouth. His wife had already gained the porch and stood, with arms akimbo, on the top step. He glanced out cautiously from behind the closed door.

On the back of a raw-boned gray mare there sat a girl of twenty, who held her place in the saddle with such grace that the Professor felt like clapping his hands approvingly. But remembering Mrs. Wentworth’s proximity, he desisted. The exercise had flushed the young cheeks with roses, and it was a face of such beauty that one could but marvel at it — the hair a coppery red, that glistened in the sunlight, the eyes gray and deep as wells, with long black lashes and arching eyebrows. The mare was a powerful creature, and it seemed hardly credible that the young girl’s slender fingers could hold the reins with such strength. She was putting her through some fantastic paces, to the delight of Daniel, the coachman, butler, valet, and general factotum of the

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Wentworth household, and to the wide-eyed horror of Melissy, the cook, who watched her from the back veranda. Mrs. Wentworth's face expressed nothing but cold displeasure; after a while the girl noticed it. With a bend of her graceful neck, she whispered a word into the mare's ear. Another instant and the animal, picking its way up the broad, white-pebbled walk, paused at the lowest step of the porch. Dorothy Wentworth dropped down, swinging the skirt of her riding habit over her arm.

"Don't look so cross, mamma, dear!" she cried gayly. "Why, Gilpie was just showing off for your special benefit — she wouldn't throw me in a hundred years. She's as gentle as a baby — aren't you, sweet-heart? Have some sugar, you pretty little thing?"

Slipping her hand down into her skirt she produced a lump of sugar which she held out invitingly to Gilpie, turning her head on one side, like a bright-eyed bird, and looking at her mother coaxingly. But still Mrs. Wentworth did not speak, and Dorothy, brushing the sugar from her fingers, ran up the few steps that separated them. As she did so she saw her father's gray head peeping from behind the door. He put his fingers to his lips quickly — but his wife read the expression on her daughter's face, and turning, caught him in the very act. She sniffed scornfully, her nose elevating itself still higher.

"What shall we do?" telegraphed Dorothy, by signs to her father.

"Heaven knows," he signified, by spreading out his hands. Then he opened his arms wide, meaning that

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Dorothy should embrace her; touched his cheek with his finger, meaning that Dorothy should kiss her; then, folding his arms across his chest, he meekly raised his eyes toward the ceiling, as if awaiting what consequences might befall. This pantomime took but a second, yet it brought a wave of amusement, like a play of sunshine, across the girl's face. She advanced to her mother's side and put her arms about her tenderly.

"Why are you so angry, dear?" she asked in a sweet voice. "What is so wicked about riding Gilpie up and down the road? And see how prettily she stands — looking at us, and wondering why you are cross! Gilpie is a beauty, mamma. We love each other dearly already. We were only just getting used to each other out there in the highway. Dear old girl — just look at those eyes of hers! She seems to understand every word."

"She's the ugliest thing I ever saw! And so vicious! I'm no judge of horses, but if that animal hasn't a temper, I'm not able to speak the truth! There!"

"A temper? Why, Donald himself told me she's lots better than she looks. It's the go in her makes her a bit higher-stepping than poor old Jock was. Donald says —"

"Donald, Donald! When did Donald see her?"

"Donald bought her for me!"

"Bought her for you?" Mrs. Wentworth's expression changed. "Donald bought her!" she went on weakly. "Why, I thought it was your father — I was sure it was your father — At any rate," standing valiantly by her guns, "I don't like the look of her."

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She's wicked about the eyes. Come out here, John, and see what you think."

There was a covert apology in the last words that Professor Wentworth tacitly accepted. He came slowly from the shelter of the hall door and stood at his wife's side, his hands behind his back, his face exceedingly grave.

"What do I think of her? If she were a bug, now, Claudia — What have you to say, Dolly?"

"I refuse to answer until you do," said Dorothy, teasingly.

"Well, then, I don't like her at all, and the sooner she is sent back the better. I gave Don credit for some taste."

"Oh, father! Oh, how *mean!*" cried Dorothy, grasping his arm between both her hands and shaking it vigorously. "Oh, how *can* you! Of course she could be prettier — yes, and daintier, too! But as Donald says —"

"What does Donald say?" called a voice. Its owner poked his head over the high back of a great willow chair at the extreme end of the veranda, where he had been listening to every word. "Come, now, Dolly, what does Donald say?"

"Handsome is as handsome does," ended Dorothy, with a roguish smile on her face as she looked at him. "You are worse than father — you *hide!* Come out here, and tell mother all about Gilpie, won't you, Don? You bought her when father wasn't looking — yes, he did, mother. Father didn't know anything about it. For-

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ward, march, Mr. Mackenzie, and let Aunt Claudia settle with you."

"To tell you the truth, Aunt Claudia," began Donald, in a wheedling tone. "The Professor said —"

"That mamma would scold — you know he did," cried Dorothy. "But really, dear, she's a darling — the horse, I mean. And she has as much snap as if she were twice as pretty."

"By 'snap' I presume you are talking of the antics you were going through when I called your father?" questioned Mrs. Wentworth, with some acerbity.

"Precisely. She's as quick as a flash — and as obedient as — as — dare I say I am?" with another roguish smile.

Donald groaned, and her father shook his finger reprovingly.

"As obedient as you might have been had not your father spoiled you," said Mrs. Wentworth. "Some day that stubborn will of yours is going to get you into trouble."

"Dear mother!" She put her arm about her mother's waist, coaxingly. "Have I been *very* wicked? Well, then, I'll have Daniel put Gilpie in her stall, and I'll get out of this rig and help you all morning! There! Will that please you, and make you glad again?"

"I say, Aunt Claudia!" put in Donald Mackenzie. "She's promised to ride to the river with me — indeed she has. Where do I come in?"

"You can help father," remarked Dorothy, with a little twinkle in her eye. "You know you love bugs,

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now, you *know* you do! Besides, you bought Gilpie, and you must be punished in some way for your crime."

"What good would he be to me?" asked Professor Wentworth, in a vexed tone. "Claudia, I never saw such a woman! Why can't you let young people be young people while they may? Is there any earthly use in saddling an old head on young shoulders — besides spoiling the last few hours of Donald's vacation —"

"John Wentworth, you don't know what you're talking about! Gracious sakes alive, did *I* say a single word about spoiling any one's pleasure? No. All *you're* afraid of is that Don will take you away an hour or two from those ugly, crawly things you've got littering up that hole you call your study! All *you* think of is bugs, bugs, bugs! You must *dream* of them. Go for your ride, Dorothy," went on the good woman, bending to kiss her daughter and showing by the action that the girl was forgiven. "Only, Donald — you bought that horse. That she's a bad-tempered creature I will maintain, and I hold you responsible for my daughter's life and limbs."

Something had restored her placidity of temper. She smiled kindly at the young man.

"Take my word for it, Aunt Claudia — both are safe with me — and with Gilpie," he said, smiling. "Dan, will you bring Tartan? I'm ready now, Dolly. Let me help you mount."

He moved to her side. She went down the steps of the porch with him, and he led the gray mare along the graveled path to the gate. Then, with a quick, graceful

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movement of his muscular arms, he lifted the girl about the waist and swung her into the saddle.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Dorothy, with a little gasp. Then, when she got her breath: "What a high-handed proceeding! You should be more accurate in your speech, Don. You said 'help.'"

"I wanted to see if you had grown any heavier," he returned, with his handsome dark eyes on her face. "Do you really like Gilpie, Dorothy?" in an earnest tone. "Or did you only say so because —"

"Have you forgotten, in two years, for what Dorothy Wentworth was famous? Truth is supposed to be one of my strong points, Donald, my lad."

"So it was — and is, I know. I am glad." He reached over and rubbed the mare's nose affectionately. "Poor old girl! There's lots of human beings like her in the world, Dolly, dear — not much to look at, but true blue underneath. Handsome is as handsome does, always. The mare will prove herself."

"You haven't forgotten your old sayings in two years, Sir Moralist," she laughed. "Here's Daniel, now. Mount, for pity's sake, and let us get away, or Gilpie will lose all respect for me."

They were a handsome couple, truly — the slender girl in her tight-fitting habit, her fair face like a tinted flower above it, her eyes shining with youth and health, the hat perched on her bright hair giving a piquant look to the sweet countenance: the young man brown and swarthy as a Spaniard, utterly devoid of a single charac-

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teristic in face or coloring to show his Scotch descent. Professor Wentworth and his wife stood gazing after them, and although they waved in response to Dorothy's parting salute, they did not exchange a word. Mrs. Wentworth was smiling. The Professor looked glum and forbidding.

"What a fine arrangement it will be!" said Mrs. Wentworth. "Really — and Donald is doing so splendidly. It seems as if —"

"It seems as if you are actually in a hurry to get rid of the girl," said the Professor. "What are we going to do when Dorothy gets married, Claudia?"

"My dear John, do you want her to be an old maid?"

"What nonsense! Of course I don't. But she's only twenty."

"Only twenty! How old was I when you asked me to share your prospects? Prospects that weren't like Donald's, either. Seventeen! And when my father wanted you to wait a year —"

"Oh, but that was different."

"Differ — Go back to your bugs, John Wentworth. She's three years older than I was, and it's high time she found a master — for her master you'll never be. I tell you, you don't know your own daughter!"

"Master! I'd like to see the man could master my Dorothy!" said Professor Wentworth, with a chuckle. "I'd like to see him! You talk as if you were as obstinate as a stone wall yourself, Claudia. And yet she can twist you around her little finger."

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"I know it," said the mother, in a troubled voice. The querulousness faded from her face, and she laid her hand on her husband's arm as if seeking strength from him. "I am often afraid, John, when I notice how, under all her coaxing ways, she is so determined. Pleasant, good-tempered, amiable—people call her, and love her for those traits. Yet I wonder at that will of hers. You can make her defer a thing by opposition—and perhaps because she would not hurt either one of us. But she never gives up. Sooner or later she has her own way. And, John, it was so very easy to give in to her, and to love her, and to spoil her, wasn't it?"

"Yes, dear," he said, tenderly, now. "It was."

"Five children before her—do you remember them, John? I wonder if you can see their tiny faces as plainly as I can at this moment? The boys—poor little fellows—who looked up at the father and mother who wanted to keep them so—and who lived just long enough to be baptized. And Jessie—Jessie was a dear baby—she and Dorothy would have resembled each other, John. Often when Dorothy looks at me I think of Jessie. And then I can refuse my living child nothing for the sake of the little dead things laid away in the churchyard." She was sobbing, and the Professor slipped his arm about her shoulders gently. "God was good to us to leave us Dorothy."

"Very good, dear," was his reply in a low voice. His wife's words had brought him back to the past—and once more there seemed to come before him the bitter

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grief she had experienced when each baby joined its fellows, until Dorothy came. Not strong, indeed — no stronger than the others, but with a hold on life that astonished the physicians — as if she were determined to live in spite of all odds.

“Dorothy has always been a marvel to me,” went on the Professor. “How many times she was at the very verge of death — and came back to us! I can not bear the thought of letting her go away. I feel as if I dare not trust her out of my sight.”

“You will be glad, then, to hear what Donald told me this morning,” said Mrs. Wentworth, with the ghost of a smile on her face. “He intends buying out the Langdons and settling here, next to us.”

The Professor gave a gasp of delight.

“He does, really? But will the Langdons sell?”

“Oh, yes. He brought up the subject to old Mr. Michael and he seemed willing. Next year, sometime. And then, Donald says, it will take another year to remodel the place according to his ideas. So that it will be two years before he deprives you of your daughter — and then she’ll only go next door.”

“But he hasn’t said anything to me —”

“He didn’t want me to say anything, either, until he speaks to you himself,” said the mother. “But of course, I had to. I think he wants to give you details of his European trip. That has something to do with his future. Do you think you can go back to your study in peace, now, Professor?”

CHAPTER IV

“HE EITHER FEARS HIS FATE TOO MUCH —”

ONE of the two young people whose horses were carrying them at a leisurely pace under the magnificent maples lining the roadway on either hand had no idea of the foregoing conversation. Donald Mackenzie might not have been surprised at it. He had only recently, in a burst of boyish confidence, discussed the subject with Mrs. Wentworth, as she had told her husband. He knew he was as dear to the Professor as if he were indeed his son, and the mother, planning, as mothers do, the future of her child, saw the happy life she craved for Dorothy, with a loving husband and a comfortable home in prospect. Despite the girl's beauty and talents, and the charm she exercised over all with whom she came in contact, the mother's wishes for her were simple as her own affectionate heart — bounded by the little town of Wentworth and circumscribed within the four walls of a neighboring cottage. No greater hope filled her days than the one of seeing her safely settled under Donald's protection — that, secure in a good man's love, she might fulfill her destiny — that of a happy wife, a good mother.

The gayety of youth reck's little of the future. Such

“He Either Fears His Fate Too Much —”

thoughts as these were far away from the bright-faced girl, whose laughing remarks wiled her companion into a merry game of chaff almost before he was aware of it. However, after riding about a mile, they came to a quiet little spot bordering the river, and here Dorothy signified her intention of dismounting. She slipped her foot out of the stirrup and sprang lightly to the ground before Donald could help her, making a funny little face at the disappointment so plainly evident on his own.

“You big baby!” she said serenely. “You try to be entirely too masterful. I must begin to educate you again — reduce you to a properly submissive mood. You take the law too much in your own hands, Don. Let us sit here a few minutes. And oh, do look! What a quantity of violets! There, Sir Highlandman, your task is set. I shall recline gracefully upon the mossy lea, and you may gather me all the violets you can possibly find.”

He obeyed her faithfully, as indeed he had ever since he first caught sight of her childish face, filling her lap with the sweet, shy beauties of the woods, and adding the white blossom of the wild strawberry to vary the dainty bouquet growing under her fingers. At last he threw himself beside her, and watched her in silence a long time.

“What are you planning?” she asked.

“Planning? Now, Dolly! Do you think that —”

“Don, there’s such a thing as equivocation. Why, I know every single line in your face. I’ve seen it often

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enough, dear knows! And when that little frown comes between your eyes and the lids half close, so —” imitating him, “you’re planning. Out with it, Don.”

For answer he turned away, and pulled absently at the grass near him.

“Perhaps — if you hadn’t seen me so often it might have been better for me, Dorothy.”

“Better for you?” She held the violets away from her to judge of the effect. “Better for — What in the world — Such a remark! As if it really mattered! Besides, I like you *so* much, dear Don, that if I saw you for the next fifty years I could never like you less.”

“Well, now, that’s encouraging at any rate,” he said, smiling. “How is it, Dolly, that you do everything so much better than other folks? Now, that bouquet! It is very pretty.”

“Why, of course it is. Get me a few leaves for the outside, will you, Don? It needs a finishing touch, and I don’t want to tie the poor little things too tight.”

“I wonder if flowers feel?” he said, rising obediently to get the leaves and bringing them to her. “One would think so by the way you handle them. You love them, don’t you, Dolly?”

“Very much,” she answered. “I love everything beautiful — this great world, this beautiful country, these sweet blossoms — everything. It is so good to be alive on God’s bright earth, Don.”

“Yes, dear,” he answered, in an absent way. “It is good to be alive, Dorothy.” He drew his breath quickly.

"He Either Fears His Fate Too Much —"

"Will you give me your attention just a moment, little girl? I want to tell you something."

"Seriously?" she asked, letting the violets fall into her lap and fixing her large eyes on his face. What she saw there brought the dimples to her cheeks. She laughed, and put up one finger with a warning gesture. "Oh, Donald, you have a secret! You're in love! You've got a sweetheart! Donald, Donald!"

He colored in the boyish way he could not overcome, despite the fact that his twenty-five years had not been thoughtless years, and that a man's burden of care and ambition had ever pressed him down.

"If I have, Dolly?"

"If you have, Don? Why, dear brother o' mine, none shall be gladder than I. Tell me about her — do tell me about her, dear. I am dying to hear."

She was all animation, sparkle, life. She put her hand on his knee earnestly.

"Aren't you jealous? Just the least bit jealous, Dorothy?" he asked, in a wistful tone.

"That will depend altogether on who she may be," said Dorothy, gravely. "Of course she can't — ever — reach my place in your heart. Or at least not yet, Don. Don't put me out of it so soon. I shall tell her *I* was your sweetheart, first, for years and years, before she ever saw you —"

"Yes, and before she will ever see me, whoever 'she' may be," said Donald Mackenzie, his voice vibrating. "Oh, Dorothy, don't *you* know who my sweetheart is?"

“He Either Fears His Fate Too Much —”

don't you? don't you? Why, since you were only a little thing in short skirts, there hasn't been any one in the world for me but you. Surely, dear, you know that?"

"Oh!" she said, putting her hand up suddenly across her eyes and shrinking from him like one in pain. "Oh, Donald! Oh, please!"

He could not understand. He saw that her lips were quivering. He reached over to draw her hand away, but she resisted his touch.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she breathed, "that it should be I — I whom you love! Oh, Donald!"

The violets lay unheeded in her lap. She turned her face away and one hand sought the other in an almost convulsive clasp. Suddenly a new thought came to her. She brought her gray eyes to his face, the words pouring from her lips incoherently:

"Don — no, you can't mean you're in love with me! That you want *me*?" anxiously. "Don't say that. Why, we're like brother and sister. And to marry — you and I? Impossible."

She leaned heavily against the tree trunk then, very pale. She could not grasp the fact that the young man beside her was in earnest. She looked at him for a word, a gesture of denial. But that face confirmed her fears — it was like an open book to her. She read it well.

"I mean that I love you from the bottom of my heart," he said slowly. "That since your father brought me, a homeless lad, to Wentworth, gave me a father's welcome and a son's place at his hospitable board, I have

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loved you. Ah, wait, wait! I did not realize it until I went to England two years ago. It came as a great surprise to me, Dolly. I was like a man who suddenly stumbled upon a priceless treasure. I have cherished my treasure carefully — it has tided me over many bad places. I should have been discouraged often were it not for the thought of you. And the day I came here — from New York — Dolly, didn't you understand, then? Didn't you feel that mine was more than a brother's kiss, than a brother's embrace —"

"No, Don, I did not," she answered. "I welcomed you with all my heart, as my dear, dear playfellow. Donald, it can not be."

"And do you think I will let you say that to me — to me — after feeding on hope two years, Dorothy? Why, you don't know me, I tell you. It's because the idea is too new, too strange. I shall teach you to love me, Dolly. I shall show you how tender a man can be —"

She rose slowly to her feet, the violets falling to the ground. He rose also, towering above her, his dark eyes full of purpose as he gazed down at her. Her lips were trembling. She drew them in — a straight, tense line. Her whole attitude was one of resistance.

"I can not tell you I love you, Don — when I don't," she said. "I can never love you. Not that way."

"You don't know what 'that way' is like, Dorothy."

"One knows by instinct — she has not to be taught," said the girl, coldly. "Again, it is impossible!"

"And I tell you it is not impossible!"

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She shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"I do not ask you to decide to-day or to-morrow, Dorothy. I ask nothing. But it has seemed so long a settled thing —"

"So long a settled thing! What do you mean?"

"Why, Dolly, your father and mother know I want you. They think us well suited to each other, and surely they are wise, dear," with touching eagerness. "Do not let me think there is even the barest shadow across their dream of our bright future — yours and mine."

"Their dream! Oh, Don, why did you give them such an impression? Now I know why father has talked so much of you this past month, and why mother is so willing to let me go wherever I will with you. Donald, really, it is not usual to arrange things so; the girl herself must be considered. And you have not thought it worth while to consult me, none of you." She spoke feelingly — not in anger, but with a peculiar pleading in her tones. "I would do much for you, and for father and mother. But there is one thing I can not and will not do — be forced into a marriage with you when I do not love you."

"Now you are cruel," he said, bitterly; "unnecessarily so."

"Why?"

"Because I do not seek to force you into a marriage. I do not ask anything — only to be allowed to try to teach you to care for me. Just try to teach you. That

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is very little. It will be two years before I shall be able to give you a home worthy of you. I have asked about the Langdon place, and old Mr. Michael seems glad enough to sell. You shall do exactly as you please with it, dear —"

"Oh, what a foolish, foolish Donald!" laying a fond hand on his arm. "What a foolish, nonsensical brother I have! Go out into that world you came from and look about you." A smile curved her lips then, the ghost of those that had played about them a few minutes before. "For a young man who merely wishes to be allowed to teach a girl what love is, you go very far," she went on. "I am afraid that all the charms of the Langdon place can not move me to a better mind. Love is, above all things, the one thing that can not be compelled."

"Indeed, indeed, not," he said, and his voice was low and sorrowful. "It came upon me like a thief in the night and overpowered me. It took from me all base thoughts — all desire of unworthy things — and for that I am grateful. When I left you, dear, and Wentworth, I imagined you were no more to me than — than our Ethel is — a dear comrade, a sweet sister, a friend. That was all — that was enough. But hardly had my foot touched English soil, and my homesick thoughts, like a wounded bird, flown back to the place that had been my boyhood's refuge — ah! then it was that your face shone out upon me from the desolation round about me — with such wonder in it, and such radiance, that

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the light in your eyes made my path all beautiful — made my heart respond to all high impulses and long to do noble deeds — for your dear sake.”

She was moved deeply.

“You plead well!” she exclaimed.

“A man must needs plead well when more than his life is the forfeit — more than his life,” he repeated, steadily.

Again she hesitated. Her gray eyes sought his face.

“Some day you will thank me,” she said very quietly.

“Some day you will see —”

“Some day *you* will see,” he interrupted, “for I can not listen to your final answer now. I dare not let myself think of the possibility with which you are trying to frighten me. To-morrow I leave here — to be gone months, perhaps. When I have gone, Dorothy, ask yourself if there is any one who will love you more than I do — who will give his life to you, to do with it as you please. Who is one with you in faith and feeling and love and trust —”

The tears were standing in her eyes.

“To sit near you to-night telling my heart that you are forever lost to me would be more than I could bear. It would drive me mad. Dearest, just for this one evening let me cheat myself with the belief that you have promised to be my own sweetheart, my little wife —”

He took her unresponsive hand in his. She could not resist him.

“It is so foolish,” half reluctantly. “But — Let it

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rest that way, then, if it will satisfy you. You must not call me fickle or deceitful when I write you? Do not say I gave you false hope, led you on —”

“I shall say nothing — nothing except what is good of the dearest girl on earth. Ah, Dorothy, there are years to think about that final answer. Years! And I had to broach the subject to-day. I am sorry I spoke to you. Maybe, if I had waited a little longer you might — But there! I had to tell you. I could not help myself.”

He still held her hand, and now he drew her suddenly to him, clasping his arm about her. Before she could divine his intention, he bent and kissed her on the lips. Donald had often kissed her — she him. But Dorothy felt that heretofore it was as a brother's right, not a lover's. She had been sorry for him, indeed, but now anger and wounded pride sent the hot blood into her cheeks. Her eyes blazed. Without a word she wrenched her hand from his clasp and ran to the gray mare's side. Donald, following, knew that Gilpie had an hour's hard ride before her, for Dorothy was in a passionate rage. He gave Tartan a quick slap, and followed her lead, keeping neck and neck with her.

CHAPTER V

PRINCIPALLY ABOUT DONALD

OF all the sentiments animating Professor Wentworth, charity came first; it was the only sentiment dearer to him than his beloved bugs. He never turned a deaf ear to a plea that had human want for its reason of being. This trait had left him in comparatively humble circumstances. His nature was philosophical, though. Having enough for immediate needs, his surplus went to those who sought it. Again and again the more provident Mrs. Wentworth upbraided him, but it seemed as if human selfishness had been entirely eliminated from her husband's make-up. Tales were told of his exceeding kindness that would astonish even a benevolent man and make the ordinary man smile. He felt no deprivation a sacrifice that went toward another's good. In fact, people had come to look upon him as so very like a guardian angel to the parish that they, too, often took his protecting care and his ready sympathy for granted. "The good John Wentworth" he was called, and where Father Preston, their dearly loved pastor, went, there followed also his chief parishioner and honored friend.

Donald Mackenzie's father had been one of John

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Wentworth's fellow-students at first, and then his chum and comrade by choice and mutual affection. There had been three of them, but the last, as is often the case with college friendships, had drifted out of their lives, leaving but these two faithful to the end. When, then, in the heyday of his manhood, fifteen years before, Walter Mackenzie was taken with the last illness he was ever to know, to whom could he turn with more trustful eyes than to the good John Wentworth? Despite his talents, Donald's father had ever been a dreamer — and there is no room for dreamers in the hustle and bustle of a great city's daily doings. He had eked out but a precarious livelihood. He was proud. Pride might have propped his independent spirit to the grave had it not been for the little lad he must leave behind him to face a city's perils.

Across the miles that separated them went his message to friend and comrade, then, and across those miles came the friend and comrade at his call. The good John Wentworth did not fail him. He could not have failed him. He soothed with tender hands and gentle speech and kind affection the last moments of the dying man. He took a great trust upon his noble shoulders: he promised to cherish Donald as if he were his own son, and it was on his broad breast that the desolate lad sobbed out his first passionate grief.

And then, when all was over, he took him away with him to the little Massachusetts town — an awkward, shy, reserved youth, his only claim to people's tenderness the

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bereavement that had come upon him, and the elusive beauty of a pair of sloe-black eyes that sought the faces of those who were kind to him with an expression in their depths that compelled affection.

Mrs. Claudia was not disposed to receive the orphan kindly. Woman like, she saw the other side of the story. She knew that boys at the age of ten are invariably sources of worry unless one has had their previous upbringing. She had prepared a mighty curtain lecture for her tender-hearted husband, and, in a great wrath, intended to compel him to find another home for his protégé. All this she resolved in her own mind — but the good John Wentworth (though he expected reproof, indeed) never was made aware of the storm brewing in his peaceful household. Yes, Mrs. Claudia had resolved to put her foot down on his Don Quixotism once for all.

She was forever planning hard-hearted things to say and do — “just to be contrary,” John Wentworth told her. And her natural tenderness would not permit her to carry them out. This was one of many similar occasions. For she did not forget, nor could she, the night that Donald Mackenzie came home.

It was snowing, she remembered, and her husband stamped his lusty way up the wide stone steps, shouting cheerily back to Daniel, who held the horse's head. With his arm around the slight figure of the boy he came into the hallway where Mrs. Wentworth stood, little Dorothy, her gray eyes big with the curiosity of a child, clinging to her skirts. Something hushed the laugh upon

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the husband and father's lips as he looked at the two so dear to him — his wife, his baby girl — and realized that here were happiness, comfort, love, into which the lonely lad he brought came as a stranger, seeking what happiness or comfort or love they chose to give him. The coldness died out of his wife's eyes as he stood the shrinking figure of the thin, black-eyed boy in the hall and unwound the gray muffler in which he was swathed to protect him from the cold.

No, Mrs. Wentworth never could forget Donald Mackenzie's home-coming. For with brave white face he stood and looked at her, his young hands clasping and unclasping, his eyes full of fear, of question — almost of terror.

"This is he, Claudia — this is poor Walter's lad," said Professor Wentworth, in a husky voice.

And the good woman, gazing, thought of the dark head of her firstborn. Strange how the thought struck home to her mother's heart! He had had black eyes, black as his hair, the nurse told her afterward, when she piteously asked to be allowed to look at his little dead face, to trace the tiny features on her memory.

And he would have been ten years old, her baby! She opened her arms, sobbing aloud, and Donald Mackenzie ran to them, sobbing also, and the Professor turned away and covered his eyes, as the mother of the dead baby and the orphan boy mingled their tears together. Donald Mackenzie found his way, at that moment, into Claudia Wentworth's heart, and never left it.

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Growing to manhood, he was given the advantages of a son in education and in opportunities. Seeing his cleverness, his foster father denied him nothing that could aid him in the future. Under different circumstances or different training the lad's natural obstinacy might have been an ugly thing to contend with. But in John Wentworth he had an example worthy of emulation — to be like him was his sole ambition.

There were many to criticize the Professor's action in thus taking into his household one who could but be a burden upon him; perhaps few made as caustic remarks as his brother William, the very one who was glad enough to welcome Donald now that he had proved himself. But John Wentworth had little regard for the opinions of those outside the world he lived in. He and William had been friendly enough in their boyhood's days, and still loved each other — yet different habits of life had made their ways of thinking different. Perhaps William Wentworth felt the force of this mild argument. The coming of beautiful Dorothy Wentworth into his life had been the final event that crowned all his interior misgivings. John had been right. There was something in the world besides money-grubbing. Something besides the delight of knowing that others envy you. Donald Mackenzie was not aware that his "Uncle William," as he had been taught to call him, sat at his desk after he left him that Thursday afternoon picturing the young man's entrance into the home that was simplicity itself, and love, and honesty — where a young

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girl's beauty gave a luxury to her surroundings that wealth could not buy for his own stately mansion.

It had not been until Donald went away from them that John Wentworth felt how good a thing it would be if he and Dorothy married — and then it was the mother who broached the subject. After that the Professor seemed to look upon it as an accepted fact. The possibility of the girl desiring otherwise never seemed to strike either parent. Dorothy did not care for the society of young men, though young men willingly sought her — too willingly, according to Mrs. Wentworth, who did not want the girl's head filled with “nonsense.”

There was one more inmate of the Wentworth household — Dorothy's first cousin, Ethel Lorimer. Again it was the Professor's doings, though his wife agreed at once to it, since she could not see her own brother's child going to reside among strangers. And so these three young people had grown up together and loved one another — differing in disposition, in character, and in sentiment, and yet alike, by reason of the very affection and nobility of living that bound their home life round with chains of gold.

CHAPTER VI

THE ONE WHO DID NOT UNDERSTAND

THEY had been galloping at breakneck pace; now, out of very pity for her sweating animal, Dorothy slacked rein and Gilpie gladly subsided into a walk. The wide macadamized road that skirted the beautiful river was fully five miles long and led to the small town of Lawton. It was only when Dorothy reached the outskirts of the town and realized how far she had come from home that she thought to give her horse a breathing spell. Perhaps, too, the hard ride had helped to placate her. Or, better than anything, the protracted silence of the offender, who, though he kept at her side, had not tried to say a single word.

He was wise, for, though the girl rarely became angry, when she did it was well to let her fight it out in her own way. When she brought Gilpie to the stone trough at the bend of the road and waited until the mare had taken a long drink, Donald thought he could venture, if not an apology, at least an excuse.

"Dorothy," he began, humbly.

She did not answer him.

"Dorothy, won't you listen to me?"

"I don't see how I can help myself," she returned then,

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ungraciously. "I can only wonder, while listening, what sort of women you have been in the habit of making love to."

The scorn in her tones crimsoned his face.

"Dorothy, that is unjust, and you know it. I am sorry I have offended you."

"No sorrier than I am. That doesn't help matters, not a single bit."

"But you were so sweet, so unattainable — there is surely an excuse for me? I could not help myself." He swung out of the saddle hurriedly and tried to take her hand, to make her look at him. But she would not let him touch her, and kept her face averted.

"Think, dear. For two years I have been planning this great moment alone with you. For two years I have dreamed of the time when your heart would waken and want me. The only sweetheart I have ever had — even in thought — beside whom all other women were as shadows. And then — and then you — Oh, when it seemed that the cup of happiness had been lifted to my lips, only — Ah, Dorothy, my little playmate, you can not understand!"

The pain in his tones smoothed away the last vestige of her anger. Her face was very soft and her eyes humid when she looked down at his bowed head.

"Understand, Don?"

"This," he touched his breast. "You have been called haughty and proud as well as beautiful, dear — but never unresponsive, before."

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"Yes? Go on."

"It is simply that you can not understand, Dorothy. Some day, please God, you will. And I shall wait for that day, dear one. I shall wait for that day."

There was a sudden light on her face, a sudden glow to her eyes. She opened her lips to speak — then shook her head. He did not see. Perhaps, if he had, some premonition of the truth might have come to him; some foreknowledge of what lay hidden in the heart of the girl he loved. But he did not see, and the moment passed, leaving him free to dream what dreams would come — the dream of happiness — the dream that bound her life to his forever.

"Dear Donald," she said, in an affectionate tone, "I know as little of the future as you do. What are we two but atoms in the great hand that upholds the universe? And if — it is to be different — afterward — no one can tell. I can not. Nor you. Only God. We'll leave it to Him. One thing I ask —"

"Yes?"

"Try to get used to — to doing without me. In the future, I mean." She grew very red. "I love you dearly, next to father and mother. But it is the same sort of love, Donald. Oh, surely you know, don't you? You know what I am trying to say?"

"I know, little girl." She had put her hand upon his shoulder in all earnestness, meeting his gaze with her honest eyes. He clasped her hand gently then, and brought it, unforbidden, to his lips. "I sha'n't press

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you — never again. I did not know the idea would come to you so strangely. Perhaps while I am trying to get used to doing without you, you will try —”

“Persistent Donald! That is a trait of the Scots, isn’t it? You can’t help your ancestry. But now that we’re friends again let’s get home, or they’ll be wondering what has become of us.”

* * * * *

There wasn’t any unnecessary luxury in the Wentworth parlor. A few fine engravings on the walls, one or two priceless onyx vases on the tables; the rosewood piano, that had been the Professor’s gift to his little girl when she came home from school for good — for, contrary to his wife’s wishes and advice, he, believing in “higher education” for women, saw that Dorothy had her share.

But it was a very cozy room withal and bore impress of loving fingers. It was a “home” room, too, as one would realize, looking in upon it when the inmates of the household were gathered there after supper.

Mrs. Wentworth occupied her favorite willow rocker night after night, generally engaged in the somewhat prosaic task of knitting woolen socks — which articles of apparel she insisted that the Professor should wear winter and summer — and Donald, also, when he was home. To-night Ethel Lorimer sat on the opposite side of the table, embroidering dainty blue flowers on a band of white satin. The Professor and Donald were standing near the door, talking gravely as men do on the occasions of parting, for Donald was to leave them on the morrow. Dorothy, with her arms over her head, reclined in a chair

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at the window, looking out into the night. She seemed tired, judging from the fatigued pose. The lights — there were many of them — fell full upon her, and Donald, suddenly turning, lost the thread of the conversation, and paused abruptly. The Professor seemed to read his thoughts. He, too, bent grave eyes on his daughter's half-averted face.

It was a noble countenance indeed, and its nobility shone forth one might almost say in spite of the great beauty which nature had bestowed upon her. Her complexion was almost waxlike, and her hair a deep shade of auburn — so deep that it looked brown now as it rested against the back of the padded green chair. She had her father's fine features softened into femininity: the nose sensitive and finely chiseled; the mouth well curved, well closed; the shining forehead broad, intelligent, blue-veined; the lashes long, black, and curling, shading eyes dark gray in hue. Eyes that flickered and flamed, or burned with steady purpose. Eyes that showed true worth and honesty, in whose clear depths there could lurk no deceit or meanness.

It was a face of character, not merely pleasant to look upon for its exquisite lines and coloring. She was not a self-willed girl, nor was she obstinate, although her mother persisted in calling her both, scarcely realizing that she herself possessed great strength of character and firm decisiveness, with which traits she had dowered her daughter. The girl had been given a splendid education, worthy the adjective even in this great day of educational

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advantages, studying with Donald under the Professor's tuition until sent away to finish. There was a future predicted for her by her teachers — but she had no desire to enter the strenuous life, nor was there any necessity for it. So she returned to Wentworth the simple, unspoiled girl of old. There Father Preston, noting with keen delight the clear acumen that made her brain almost a masculine one, began to initiate her into the mysteries of theology and the science of the saints — amazed, indeed, at the ready response that greeted his efforts, making his work a labor of love. He had wonderful ideas for Dorothy Wentworth — ideas that the girl herself would have smiled at, for she had no calling to the higher life.

This was she who now sat under the brilliant light of the lamps, unconscious of the gaze of these two — her father and her lover. Donald's heart was heavy indeed. Heavy with the thought of parting, the shadow of the morrow. Who could tell what lay between that morrow and their next meeting? Some omen whispered that this girl was never to be his; he listened to the voice, and his soul was heavy with its desolation. The father, too, seemed to imagine at that moment that the transparent skin took on a more waxlike pallor; that the blue veins showed forth under the delicate mask that hid them with darker hue. The girl looked unearthly, he told himself, with an uneasy turn of his handsome old head. And turning so, he met Donald's gaze. A gleam of understanding passed from one face to the other — then the

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Professor, putting out his hand, let it rest, with tender sympathy, on the young man's shoulder. No words were spoken, words were not necessary. They moved from the door and found seats at the table with Mrs. Wentworth and Ethel. Ethel, with a smile, held up her scarf for the young man's inspection, and he examined it as if there were nothing of any consequence in the room but a handful of violets scattered on a satin band.

"Come, Dorothy, come, girl," cried the father, in a cheery voice, "let us have some music, or our blues will really turn black pondering over the boy's departure. Something lively and happy, child."

Dorothy stirred and seemed to bring her thoughts to the room with difficulty. She rose, with a little weary air, and stood beside her chair for a few seconds. Then she moved to the piano without a word. Mrs. Wentworth did not notice the unusual listlessness of her whole figure, nor did Ethel. But the Professor turned to look at her once more, a perplexed expression on his face, and with a sudden leap of the heart Donald asked himself the reason of her despondency. Could it be that the few words he had spoken, the unveiling of his heart, the unlocking of that inner chamber wherein he kept his dearest hopes, had led her to think of him — perhaps begin to realize some of that sweet pain —

But he drew himself together sharply. No, no — he dared not think so. Dorothy would not equivocate, and she had been taught too well. Here was no hesitating, vacillating woman, unconscious of the forces of her own

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nature. Dorothy would not condescend to subterfuge.

So he told the trembling little hope that rose, fluttering, in his heart, and that, once born, once acknowledged, gained in strength with every breath he drew. Her fingers lingered on the keys, tenderly she evoked the chords, grouping them with loving little touches full of deepest melancholy. And then her voice took up the strain :

“What’s this dull town to me?
Robin’s not near!
What was’t I wished to see,
What wished to hear?
Where all the joy and mirth
Made this town heav’n on earth?
Ah! They’re all fled with thee,
Robin Adair!”

The little flutter of hope in Donald’s bosom grew and surged through it. The blood quivered in his veins. His eyes glistened. She sang on, unconscious of the meaning that her words conveyed, far away from them and from the town that held them. But they did not know. Mrs. Wentworth, with a curious twinkle in her eye, looked at Donald. There was some understanding, surely, between them, or Dorothy would not sing that song. Of course, it was unlike her daughter, but a girl in love —

The Professor, leaning forward, laid his hand on Donald’s knee. And the girl’s sweet young voice rose and fell in beautiful melody:

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“But now thou’rt cold to me,
Robin Adair!
But now thou’rt cold to me,
Robin Adair!
Yet him I lov’d so well
Still in my heart shall dwell;
Oh, I can ne’er forget
Robin Adair!”

“Is it all right, Don?” asked the Professor, in a low voice. Ethel heard and listened for the reply, with lids that hid the eagerness in her eyes. At the question Donald seemed to wake suddenly, as from a dream. Pain succeeded where had been daring joy.

“Oh, sir,” he returned brokenly, “she isn’t singing for me. Her heart is far away from us.”

“Donald —”

“We won’t try to say any more about it, Professor,” in a wistful voice — a voice that brought a sudden rush of tears to Ethel’s eyes, so that she could not see the violets growing under her fingers. “Perhaps, after a while — It was too good to be true, wasn’t it?”

“You mean —”

“Nothing at all — nothing. We haven’t come to any agreement yet. Dolly is only a child at heart — she doesn’t understand.”

“Oh, of course!” with a relieved air. Then he chuckled. “What it is to be young and — fearsome, laddie. She’ll get used to it, poor, impatient wooer. She’ll get used to it. Wait and see.”

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Donald smiled.

"Dear me!" groaned the Professor; raising his voice, then: "I believe I asked you for something lively, child! That's as melancholy as a November rain. Tut, tut, Dorothy!"

Her wandering thoughts thus recalled, the girl immediately broke into a rollicking ballad, relating the doings of a "bold buccaneer who roved the main," a song her father loved, with its gay, lilting chorus, in which he always took part. But her heart was not in it, and when she finished it she rose abruptly from the stool and came to the table, and perched herself beside him, letting her head droop until her shining hair mingled with his snow-white locks.

Donald was talking then of his travels and of some of the things he had seen and done. They were eager to hear. Ethel laid down her work and sat with folded hands, her girlish face lighted up with enthusiasm. She was very pretty, with a sweet expression, clear, blue eyes, and fair hair folded neatly and daintily away from her high forehead. She looked very much like her Aunt Claudia — in fact would have passed for her daughter rather than the strikingly beautiful girl opposite.

"I called on Uncle William before I left New York, as you know," said Donald. "What shall I say to him for your bracelet, Dolly, when I go back?"

Dorothy looked down at the gold circlet on her slender wrist.

"Thank him, of course — it is very pretty," she said,

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without enthusiasm. "I am more grateful for his kind thought of me than for his gift. But do not say that — it might hurt him."

Mrs. Wentworth pursed her lips together.

"Hurt Uncle William! I suppose he asked you if John's home were as clean as ever?" she inquired in a sarcastic manner.

Donald laughed.

"No, he didn't. He's getting older now, Aunt Claudia, and has more sense. His home might be a little more like home if you were in it."

He spoke warmly — there was no fear of umbrage. Donald knew he could give utterance to his thoughts here, even about his foster father's brother.

"Aunt Joan is really riding high. She had her butler dressed in a uniform that reminded me of the pictures we see of old court days. The poor fellow actually had his hair powdered! And his nether limbs! I never saw such a pair of calves on a man in all my life."

"Stuffed," said Aunt Claudia, sniffing. Professor Wentworth laughed heartily.

"It was her 'at-home' day — I dodged it," said Donald. "I suppose those things weren't to your taste either, Dolly?"

Was it the flickering light of the lamp that brought the color to Dorothy's transparent face? Or was it imagination on Donald's part? He did not know. Her reply came instantly.

"I went out a good deal while I was there, Don, and

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helped her to receive. Aunt Joan tried to make it as pleasant as she could for me."

"Yes," said Donald, "Uncle William told me. He was in a little trouble when I called the first time and didn't say much about Dorothy. But on Friday, when I went back, he mentioned, by way of passing, that Aunt Joan had set her heart on marrying Dolly to the bluest-blooded aristocrat in her set, and that one day, right in the midst of the merrymaking, Dolly discovered she was homesick. Nothing could keep her then. She kicked over the traces and bolted, Uncle William said. And Aunt Joan was furious!"

There was silence. The Professor, smiling, touched his daughter's cheek with a loving hand.

"When we marry Dolly we won't ask Joan's help, will we, darling?" he asked fondly.

The question was an unfortunate one. Claudia Wentworth looked up expectantly. Surely this was an opportune moment for Donald to say what he must. She could not see Donald's face. No one spoke, nor did any one understand that the sudden brightness of Dorothy Wentworth's eyes was that of unshed tears.

"I'd like to know what sort of a recluse John Wentworth would have been now had he married in the 'set' his brother moves in," said Mrs. Wentworth, with some asperity. Uncle William, testy, cranky Uncle William, whom she disliked as heartily as he disliked her, was a sore point. "The Lorimers didn't come over in the Mayflower, but they're of one of the best old

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Maryland families, and as good as the Wentworths any day!"

"I chose Claudia Lorimer in preference to any girl I knew thirty years ago," said the Professor, in a gay voice. "She doesn't do any more boasting of that fact than she can help — she didn't seem a bit proud of it then, either. In fact the only thing she ever gloried in, to my knowledge, was that she could dance the minuet the prettiest of any one I ever knew. That's a dance should never be out of fashion, Don — although it was antiquated when she and I were young. Put down those socks, Claudia, and let us dance it now. Dolly will play."

She did put down the socks — she dropped them, in sheer amazement.

"John Wentworth! And at your time of life!"

"I dare say she could do it just as prettily to-day," laughed Donald. "But when I call on Uncle William shall I tell him you are coming to see him — any of you?"

"Not I," said John Wentworth. "William knows me and I know him. It's no use going to New York to quarrel — we can do it just as well by letter."

"He is altogether smitten with Dolly," said Donald.

"She's an out and out Wentworth, that's why — red hair and all," said Mrs. Wentworth. Dorothy smiled. She could afford to smile when the epithet "red" was applied to that beautiful hair of hers.

"I won't have my daughter called red-headed!" said John Wentworth.

"Her hair isn't red!" said Ethel, indignantly.

The One Who Did Not Understand

The mother's eyes twinkled.

"What color is it, Don?"

"The prettiest color in the world," he answered.

"Satisfactory, at any rate," said the Professor, "and her mother will agree with you. Go on about William, Don."

"He lost a great sum of money just the week I called there. He had put a detective on the case and was trying to keep it from the public. It seemed no one could be suspected of the crime but one of Uncle William's employees. And do you know, the queerest thing happened to me. I'll have to tell you all about it. You see, George Wyndon —"

"Wyndon?" asked Dorothy, fixing her wondering glance on him. "Surely George Wyndon wasn't implicated in any way?"

"Oh, I forgot — he told me about you, Dolly. You did know him, didn't you?"

"Indeed, yes. You remember?" appealing to her father and mother. "Beatrice Wyndon — the blind girl — that's her father. Oh, Donald — did you see Beatrice Wyndon?"

"No," he answered, "but her father told me of her."

"So you were speaking to him? I like him very much. He is such a simple, affectionate, honest man —"

"Yet he is accused of stealing two hundred thousand dollars of Uncle William's money," said Donald.

"George Wyndon! Impossible! Why, he wouldn't take a pin that didn't belong to him!" cried Dorothy.

The One Who Did Not Understand

"Oh, you don't know him, Don. And that girl! She is positively angelic. I have often heard the term used, but I never realized its meaning until I saw her."

"Uncle William believes him innocent," said Donald, slowly. "I did, too, at first."

"And you don't now? Oh, Don, why?"

"Let me begin at the beginning," he said. "Perhaps you can puzzle it out better than I have succeeded in doing."

He told the story then as our readers know it, and they listened breathlessly. When he came to the scene in the theater, and related the conversation as it occurred between George Wyndon and the unknown, Dorothy gave a sharp exclamation.

"Felix Dunbar!" she said. "You are sure you have the name right, Don?"

"Positive — it is an uncommon one," he returned. The others gazed at the girl in astonishment.

"Go on," she said. Her face was flushed with excitement. "Do finish, Don, and I'll tell you why I asked."

So he related the interview with Wyndon, and the man's denial of all that Donald had overheard. Mrs. Wentworth heard him incredulously.

"How did it turn out?" asked Ethel.

"I suppose it is mean to have to say I have no idea — just when your curiosity is excited," said Donald. "I'll let you know as soon as I hear anything. It's three weeks ago — Knox must surely have unearthed some clue since,"

The One Who Did Not Understand

"And you think he's guilty?" asked Ethel.

"I can't tell you," said Donald. "Reason says he is — instinct says he isn't. Do you know, I feel mixed up in it somehow? I imagine I shall hear a good deal about it when I go back. Perhaps it is on account of overhearing that conversation — such a queer one —"

"Of course he's guilty," said Mrs. Wentworth. "Didn't the man speak to him — didn't you hear him? They just planned it together —"

"But I know who Felix Dunbar is," said Dorothy, in a quiet voice.

"You know who Felix Dunbar is!" exclaimed Donald. "Great Scott!"

"Felix Dunbar is Aunt Joan's butler," said Dorothy. "I was there when Aunt Joan engaged him, and I remarked what a nice name he had. The man in the green uniform and the powdered hair —"

"And the nether limbs of which I do not approve," put in Donald. "Yes?"

Dorothy shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know any more, Don. Only that the name was such an unusual one I would not have remembered that much."

"We'll settle the puzzle by sleeping on it," said Aunt Claudia. "It's nearly one o'clock. I haven't been up as late as this in ten years."

"One song for me, Dorothy," said Donald. "Sing 'Home, Sweet Home,' before we go. I shall not be here to-morrow night, little sister."

The One Who Did Not Understand

She **smiled** at him tenderly, and went to the piano, while **he** remained seated, his head upon his hand. Her voice **was** deep and full, rarely sweet and very low — so that **when** she sang it seemed as if the words were meant for **but** one alone — and that one each who listened. When **she** finished she closed the piano softly, as if shutting away some dearly loved treasure. No one spoke. She went to her mother's side and kissed her; to **Ethel**; to her father, the best-loved one. To Donald, who **rose** and waited, she gave both her hands, shrinking a little at the light in his eyes. For when Dorothy sang, all other memories were swept away, and he could but remember that this was his hope of earthly paradise, to hold her heart in his keeping. Summoning courage, she bent her graceful head, turning up her cheek, and he pressed his lips to it gently, praying to God that some day, soon, she would understand, and give him the affection that he craved.

CHAPTER VII

AUNT JOAN'S VISITOR

"LIFE isn't really worth living when one has to beg so hard for a few paltry, miserable dollars," cried Mrs. Wentworth, in an angry tone.

"A few paltry, miserable dollars! It's pretty near a thousand," said William Wentworth. His face was very red and he tugged at his collar two or three times as if it choked him. His wife knew the symptoms well. They meant that she would have to use a little moral suasion to carry her point. "I told you two weeks ago that we'd have to retrench. You are certainly retrenching, aren't you? Last Saturday I gave you seven hundred dollars; yesterday six hundred; and to-day you want another thousand! And for what? An old woman like you wasting money on nonsense! Well. You won't get it, that's all. And though the remark may be vulgar, and not at all in keeping with our position in society," — the sarcasm was exquisite, — "you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

With which Parthian shot the old man stamped his way into the hall, seized his hat, and departed. There were no doors to slam, or he might have vented his rage

Aunt Joan's Visitor

more noisily. The stately butler showed him out with impassive face, and then, as his mistress crossed the hall and entered the library, followed her.

She was seated at the table in the center of the room, frowning darkly. Nor did the frown leave her face when she looked up.

"What is it?" she asked, curtly.

"I came to give warning, madam," he said.

Now, this handsome servant had been the delight of Mrs. Wentworth's worldly heart — a delight that increased in proportion to the envy of her friends. She sat up, a proud, straight figure in the high-backed chair, and looked at him as if she could not believe her ears.

"What are your reasons, Felix?" she asked, coldly. "What have you to complain of?"

"Nothing, madam," he answered, "nothing at all. I have come into a few hundred pounds from an uncle of mine, and I'm going back home to England for a while."

Mrs. Wentworth opened her lips to speak, but thought better of it.

"Very well," she said. "At the end of your month, I suppose?"

"Yes, madam. The day after to-morrow."

"I am sorry to lose you, Felix — you have been very conscientious," she said, with what graciousness she could assume, and the man, a pleased smile on his face, — for Mrs. Wentworth rarely praised any of her servants, — withdrew, leaving his mistress in a petulant state of mind indeed.

Aunt Joan's Visitor

The sheet of paper she had drawn toward her was still guiltless of anything save the date, and she was staring before her with abstracted eyes when the man entered once more, bringing a card.

"Randolph Carew" was the inscription. Mrs. Wentworth fingered it a moment.

"Show him in here," she said at last.

The young man who came into the room now was evidently welcome, for the frown left her forehead as she rose to greet him.

"My dear Randolph! And at this hour! Not eleven o'clock yet! Where are you going? What in the world do you want?"

"Your advice, principally," answered the newcomer. "I actually want your advice, Cousin Joan."

They were relatives in the remotest degree, and Randolph Carew really strained a point when he addressed her by a term denoting consanguinity. Or perhaps Joan Wentworth was a little proud of being so addressed by this handsome scion of one of the best families in New York. She was fond of him in her own way, too. He put his hat and gloves on the table before her, with the freedom that betokened familiarity, and threw himself into a chair.

"My advice?" She laughed. "I wish William could hear you. He just left me — in a rage hot enough to burn green wood in December. And that butler of mine has given me warning. Judge of my present mental attitude."

Aunt Joan's Visitor

"Distressing, I have no doubt," he drawled. "What's the matter with Felix?"

"Somebody belonging to him has left him a little money. Of course he won't work until it's gone. Are you in a hurry?"

"No."

"I am trying to write a note to Mrs. Montresor. I want her for my supper next week, and if she isn't asked first she won't come."

"So you're going to have that little supper, after all? Didn't you tell me that Mr. Wentworth —"

"Oh, bother! The same old story! You make it your business to let Margaret Montresor know you'll be here, won't you, Randolph?"

"No, I won't," he said, crossly. "I refuse to do anything of the sort. Don't push the thing too far, Cousin Joan — Mrs. Montresor and I understand each other. I've come to find out something from you this morning, and if you don't tell me I'll cut the whole thing — supper included."

"Randolph!" Her eyes opened wide at him. "You know I count on you. What *is* the matter? You must certainly have been up late."

"I'm sick of the whole business — bored to death. I haven't said anything to you — it wasn't worth while — but I can't stand it any longer. I want to talk to you straight and honest. Why haven't you decent doors in your house? How many servants are listening behind those draperies?"

Aunt Joan's Visitor

He was certainly in an ugly temper. Mrs. Wentworth did not mind. She bit at the end of her penholder, her handsome face showing mild curiosity.

"I don't think there's any one listening, and you know it is not necessary to shout so loudly that the servants will be attracted. But first, where were you last night, if I may ask?"

"I was at home, of course."

"At home, of course! You're getting to be quite a recluse, aren't you?"

"Is that what you call it? Well, I've come here to give you my reasons why, and to ask your help if you can give it to me. It may be foolishness on my part — but I'll risk it anyway."

His face was pale indeed, and his lips set. She gave him a glance out of the corner of her eye, appearing not to notice.

"I've been like the rest — no better, no worse." He flung the words at her defiantly. "Who among them could condemn me?"

She laughed.

"Now, I'm sure your last meal didn't agree with you," she said. "What *is* it, Randolph?"

"I've had many good times in my life," he went on, heedless of the interruption. "I've made love, in a light and social way — the expected way — to many women. What of it?"

Again the amused smile rippled across her face.

"This is — er — a confession?"

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"Call it so. My hands are clean — clean enough," looking at them, while a satirical expression curled his lips. She laid her pen down, meekly.

"I can hold my head high as the majority — higher than most," he went on. "I am healthy, strong, rich," and again he smiled. "People like me. I am what they call a popular young man."

Mrs. Wentworth regarded her nails with elaborate attention.

"Why did she go home?" he burst forth, savagely. "Why — the way she did? There — it's out — and I will have the question answered. For three months it has been tormenting me. There is a reason. And if you don't or can't or won't tell me what the reason is, I shall force my way into her presence, though a thousand try to prevent me."

"In—deed!" Mrs. Wentworth raised her eyebrows. "Don't be ridiculous, Randolph."

A little ashamed of his outburst, the young man sank back into his chair.

"So it really hit you as hard as that? I had nothing to do with her sudden departure — at least I do not consider myself to blame in the matter. She simply took a notion into her head and carried it out. I imagine," she looked at him with mocking eyes, "I imagine you think Dorothy one of those sweetly submissive, milk-and-water creatures —"

"By heaven, I do not!" he cried. "That least of all."

"There you are right," said Mrs. Wentworth. "That

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least of all." She gave him a sharp glance. "Three months ago! And you remember her yet? It seems impossible."

"I never met a girl like her," he said. "It's no use saying one thing and meaning another. If she doesn't marry me —"

"Margaret Montresor will."

"Margaret Montresor and I are friends — simply that, and nothing more."

"Dorothy thought different."

He caught his breath.

"She heard gossip then? That was it? About me — and Mrs. Montresor?"

"She heard nothing but what I told her, and then only the truth — that Margaret Montresor would marry you if you asked her. Every one knows that."

His lip curled.

"Margaret Montresor is a good woman. I doubt if she is easier to be won than any other good woman. Talk is very cheap when envy prompts it."

"Absolve me from envy, then. I like Margaret."

"If you like her do not malign her. About Dorothy —"

"And I do not like Dorothy."

"Ah, Cousin Joan — for my sake —"

"For your sake?" She raised her eyebrows quizzically. "For your sake? What then, little boy?"

"Tell me."

"The reason why my beautiful niece left for the desert of her native plains? That is what you want to know?"

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It was delightful to feel that she could torment this usually self-possessed young man.

"Exactly." His face was unconcerned enough, but his voice quivered. "Tell me, Cousin Joan!" he begged, so fervently that she laughed aloud.

"I should like Margaret Montresor to hear you!"

His hands gripped together tightly. He would show her as brave and as placid a countenance as his perturbed mind would allow. But there was a limit, and he knew that he was strained to the last notch.

"You remember the evening of the Colonial dance at Mrs. Burton-Jennings' — yes, I see you do."

"She left the day after."

"Yes. You were kind enough to send her some flowers — roses, I think. I can not remember —"

"Roses, white roses — yes, go on. What does it matter —"

"A simple girl enough — too transparent for our set," said Mrs. Wentworth, coolly. "I think — because it was you — she meant to save them. Girls are romantic. She was putting the roses in water that night when I ran into her room for a little chat. I laughed at her at first, and then sat down to talk seriously to her — of you."

"Of — me?" He was not surprised; only deeply interested.

"Yes." Mrs. Wentworth laughed unpleasantly. "Whoever had her training perfected a fool," she said then. "I talked to her as if she were my own daughter. I told her that all she had to do was to play her cards

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well. It was plainly to be seen how you felt in the matter. Of course, there was some talk of you and Mrs. Montresor — every one knew that she liked you very much —”

“Telling that to her — to Dorothy —”

“I got what I deserved for my pains,” said Mrs. Wentworth, coldly. “She informed me that she had never learned to play cards; that angling was a sport they found no time to teach at college; and that her parents had not brought her up to send her to market to be viewed by a purchaser, and acquired when it suited his good pleasure —”

“Dorothy Wentworth said that?” incredulously.

“You remember she isn’t milk-and-water,” said Dorothy’s aunt. “The next day she went home. Have you, in all your life, ever heard of a more perfect little idiot? You are smiling. A good joke, wasn’t it? You must enjoy it.”

“I do,” he said, rising to his full height — a splendid, courtly figure — one that could command admiration anywhere — his handsome face aglow with happiness. “I thought I had lost a great treasure,” exultantly, “and the great treasure has been in my hand all the time. Cousin Joan, I am going to Wentworth, and if Dorothy will have me —”

“You must stay until after my supper —”

“Supper! Do you think —”

“But Margaret Montresor —”

“What do I know of your Margaret Montresors? Am

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I not **going** to Dorothy, the lily maid? Come, Cousin Joan, **wish** me success."

"**What** do you call success?" carried away by the intensity **of** his vibrating tones. "Don't marry yet, Randolph. You are such an acquisition — too valuable to be lost. Besides, Dorothy cares absolutely nothing for society —"

"Nor do I. What is anything in the world compared to Dorothy?"

"There is some one else, Randolph."

"Some one else? What do you mean? A lover? She is engaged —"

"No, no. But there has been some talk. I do not understand it — I never bothered much with William's people. The mother is a dowdy country woman — milks cows and all that sort of thing. You will enjoy introducing her to your friends."

"I may, at that."

Mrs. Wentworth laughed.

"Dorothy is intensely fond of her mother."

"Then her mother must be a good woman."

"Oh, good!" She shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, never mind — you have made me very happy. I am glad I obeyed the impulse that brought me here this morning."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Write to them first and ask permission to plead my cause in person."

"And then —"

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"The inevitable."

"At last? I can scarcely believe it. It is really a romance. Good morning, now, Randolph — I must get out my invitations." She gave him her hand. "I do wish you success from the bottom of my heart, if only for the honor of having you in the family. Can I say anything nicer than that? But the little goose doesn't deserve her good fortune. And about the supper — you will be here, I know. Remember, I am Dorothy's aunt."

CHAPTER VIII

THE "CAREW FELLOW"

DONALD MACKENZIE had been gone a fortnight. He had written to Dorothy, but there was no word in his letter to betray the hope that she might be thinking of him in the way he wished. This morning, however, had brought two more from him, one for the Professor. Also, by a strange coincidence there arrived with his two others exactly alike, and in a handwriting unfamiliar to either father or daughter. There was a laugh over the curious pair of letters, and Professor Wentworth studied the second one somewhat carefully. To Dorothy it seemed a bad omen that Donald had written so soon again — and to her father as well. She flushed, grew pale, and flushed once more, handled the letter nervously, wondering if he had reopened the subject, and if he had, what she could say to him.

Breakfast was ready, then, and she laid the missives aside until after it was finished. So did the Professor, reluctantly. He dared not open them, for his wife was strict in her rule that mail should not be "read on an empty stomach." No one knew what might be in them, and "it was better to face fortune, good or bad, let it be

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what it might, with a good breakfast to support one." Which reflection will show of what stuff her philosophy was made.

Nevertheless, even she could scarcely restrain her curiosity this morning, and she looked at Dorothy more than once during the progress of the meal. Dorothy noticed this, and felt embarrassed. She wondered what was in Donald's letter — and how much her mother knew. No word had been spoken on the subject since Donald left. Many times the girl had been prompted to talk it over with both her parents, but feeling as she did in the matter she could not bring herself to do so. Her father, she knew, would understand. But her mother would tell her that her ideas were romantic ones, and that if she would she could grow to care for him. She felt it scarcely fair to discuss it with her father alone, and it was too sore a subject to stand criticism. That she must pain Donald grieved her, indeed — but she knew that if he repeated his offer in this letter she must answer him in a way to show him how deceptive must be any hope he could entertain. So she went up to her room to read her letters alone.

Her fears were not verified. He had been thinking of her, he said, and so he sat down to write to her, although his letter to her father had been gone only an hour. He betrayed his character in every line. There was not a single word of endearment in it, but he made her one with himself, telling her of his life, his motives, his ambitions, even asking her advice about the little things

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that were coming to harass him in the profession he had chosen. It was a letter that necessitated a reply in the mood in which it was written, or none at all. It simply identified her with himself, brought her into his existence, asked her to look at things with his eyes. Her face was very grave as she finished the long epistle, and, folding it up, replaced it in its envelope. She was weighing his love in her own mind, then, asking herself if she could not in time return it. Supposing that she talked it over with her father? He was wise and clear-sighted. Marriage with Donald might mean a peaceful, happy life, if —

Ah, that mighty "if." Why had they not told her, hinted at it, made her feel that at some future day Donald was to be her husband? If they had but accustoming her to the notion, given her some idea. If —

She picked up the other letter with a weary little sigh and opened it carelessly. She had never seen the handwriting before. Her eyes were fastened on her own name staring up at her from Donald's envelope, until she opened the folded sheet.

Why did she tremble so? Why did the red blood rush to her forehead and fade again, leaving her deathly pale? Her fingers began to shake, so that she could not see, and when she held the note closer to her eyes, greedy to read every word, her sight was blurred. She put the letter down on her knee, then, and pressed her hands, suddenly grown cold, across her wet lashes. But only for a moment. As if hungry for a sight of the written lines

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she took it up once more, and once more perused it, quivering with nervousness, shaking in every limb.

A noise at the door attracted her. She started to her feet. Her father entered the room. He, too, was quite pale, and held a letter in his hand.

"Dorothy!" he said almost sternly. "Dorothy, what does this mean?"

She held out her arms to him, sobbing. Her letters fell to the floor unheeded. She only saw his face, anxious, grieved, questioning, and it hurt her.

"Oh, father!" she said. "Oh, my own father!"

He held her close. He did not understand — he could not understand yet. But however this strange thing had come about, his little girl was not to blame. So he put his arms around her tenderly, for she was crying, and not since she had been a baby had he seen his brave Dorothy cry. Every sob cut his heart as if it were a knife.

"Hush, hush," he said at last. "This will never do, Dolly — this will never do, child. Tell me what it is all about, dear."

"It has been such a long while," she whispered brokenly, "I thought — he had forgotten, father. I thought it was all forgotten."

He did not speak.

"I have been so unhappy," she went on, with a catch in her throat. "But I would not let myself think so. And when I felt very badly I used to get away — alone —"

She hesitated. Her father's brow was heavy, his lips set.

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"I am all at sea, Dorothy," he said in a quiet tone. "Will you calm yourself and tell me how this has occurred? I do not know what to think—I am dumfounded! Good Lord, child, I thought it was Donald! Why isn't it Donald, Dolly?"

"Oh, you are not angry at me—surely, you are not angry at me?" she said, piteously, drawing away from him and looking at him with quivering lips. "Father, you wouldn't be angry at your own little girl? Surely not."

"But —"

"Don has always been my big brother—I never thought of him that way—never. No one ever said anything to me; we were so used to each other. Won't you come over here and sit down in my rocker until I tell you everything? I am not to blame—I only kept just a little—a very, very little, from you. Let me tell you just how it happened, father, please."

He seated himself, and she drew a hassock to his feet. The sunlight streaming through the windows fell upon her sweet face and lighted into radiance her shining hair. There was not a shadow of guile in the eyes she brought to the level of his earnest gaze.

"It was three months ago—while I was with Aunt Joan," she began rapidly. "The very first evening I met—Mr. Carew. I had never known any one like him before—and two weeks is a long, long time, when you see some one every day—some one who is clever and original. And he was so kind to me and attentive,"

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— she blushed vividly; "teasing me a good deal about being a country girl. But he was different. Compliments? Dear father, it was sickening to listen to the others. He never praised me once for anything—except my religion."

"Your religion?"

"It came up on several occasions. Aunt Joan laughs at religion, you know." She knitted her eyebrows. "She did not laugh at religion in my presence after the first time. And for that reason he called me a rabid little Roman."

"Well?" asked Professor Wentworth, seeing that she paused.

"That's all, father."

"That's all!" The Professor stared at her.

"That's all, dear. One night we had been to a splendid affair — a Colonial dance they called it, at the house of one of Aunt Joan's friends. Mr. Carew —" again she hesitated over the name, "had given me some lovely roses, and I wanted to keep them. Aunt Joan used to come to my room every night before she went to bed. She laughed at me for trying to save my roses.

"Do you know you are an extremely pretty girl, Dorothy?" she said. "And if you play your cards well you can capture Randolph Carew, the greatest catch of the season. Every girl at Mrs. Jennings' to-night was madly jealous of you. A little cleverness on your part is all that is needed now."

The Professor's face was grim and stern, and the look

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in his eyes did not bode well for "Aunt Joan." "So!" he said. "That's the sort of a hotbed of frivolity I trusted you to, is it? I wish I had taken Claudia's advice. Something always happens that should not when I go against her wishes. But I'll write to William, and I'll tell him —"

"No, no, no — this is in confidence. Uncle William knows nothing." She thought of what Aunt Joan had said about Mrs. Montresor, but a feeling of shame prevented her from telling even her father that part of it. "I was very angry, father. I told her I had never learned to play cards — least of all to gamble for a man's favor, and that I meant to go home immediately. She lost her temper. But it didn't do any good, and we parted bad friends. Mr. Carew called the next afternoon, but I would not see him, and I left that night. Now you know why Aunt Joan has never written."

"And now Randolph Carew has," said the father gently.

"Now he has," whispered Dorothy, and her father knew there was only one "he" in the world for her.

He picked up the letter from where he had laid it on the table to listen to Dorothy's story, and read it aloud:

"MY DEAR MR. WENTWORTH:

"I am going to presume on good nature. I am coming to you for the favor of an interview in reference to a matter that is very dear to me, and closely connected with your daughter. My name is doubtless a strange

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one to you. Nevertheless, I should like to make it better known, and would ask you, sir, to let me call upon you so that I can plead my cause in person. To be frank, I love Miss Dorothy, and have no higher or more precious hope than the hope of winning her. Will you pardon my impatience? I shall reach Wentworth on the tenth. Believe me.

"Faithfully yours,

"RANDOLPH CAREW."

"I have no fault to find with the letter," mused the Professor. "He knows what he wants to say and says it. Direct and to the point. What is he?" frowning. "One of those society fops —"

"Will you look at my letter?" said Dorothy, hastily thrusting it into his hand. Again he read, but this time not aloud.

"DEAR MISS DOROTHY:

"Is it presumption on my part to write to your father and to yourself? If there is in your heart for me a single shadow of the feeling that I entertain for you, you will not be angry. I have been utterly miserable since you slipped out of my life so suddenly. I could not understand it. So, yesterday, unable to grope any longer in the dark, I went to your aunt for light. She told me — what? I can not put it into words. But it raised hope in my breast; and I am coming to hear from your own lips what you have against me. Ah, Dorothy, you will be kind to me?"

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The Professor did not look at the girl's burning face, but folding it up handed it back to her.

"I like them both, child — both letters are honest ones. It remains to be seen whether I shall like the writer of them. But Donald — what will Donald do? Here is his letter — not much courage in it, lassie. Why wasn't it Donald — our own Donald, and not a stranger? And what — what will your mother say?"

"Will *you* tell her?" asked Dorothy, a little wistfully. "I'm afraid she'll be angry, father. I'm afraid she wanted Donald — worse even than you."

The break in her voice touched her father's heart. He had turned to leave the room, but he came back again, and bent over her, the gentle, kindly expression on his face that made many people look twice at the "good John Wentworth"; that made Dorothy feel safe indeed in her father's love.

"We don't want any one or anything that isn't for your complete happiness, dear," he said. "If it isn't Donald — well, it can't be Donald. That's all. Donald himself is too noble to expect the impossible. And this — stranger —" he glanced at the letter, "this Carew fellow — If we find he is not good enough for you —"

"Oh, father — if you think that, I shall never look at him," said Dorothy. "Never, never — unless you and mother like him. Only," she cast an appealing look at him from under her long lashes, "you'll *try* to like him, father? For my sake? *Please?*"

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"I'll try," said the Professor. "God knows I'll try, Dorothy."

But there was no brightness in his face as he went downstairs to find Mrs. Wentworth and lay the whole matter before her. There wasn't a spark of worldliness in his wife's body. And even if this "Carew fellow" turned out to be a millionaire twenty times over, he knew she'd rather have Dorothy and Donald married and settled in the Langdon house next door, than to have this stranger for a son-in-law, no matter what his advantages. Her reception of the news justified his worst fears. She was thrown into a white heat of anger.

"I consider Dorothy a deceitful girl to let such a thing go on and say nothing," said the mother.

"I should hardly call it deceit," ventured the Professor, turning over the letter in his hand. "What did she know about it, Claudia?"

"She was as good as engaged to Donald Mackenzie," exclaimed Mrs. Wentworth, hotly.

"That I will not allow," answered the Professor. "You yourself know there was no word said to her of Donald — how was she to dream of that when we scarce and only lately thought of it ourselves? Let us be reasonable."

"Reasonable!" cried Mrs. Wentworth. "Reasonable! When our child's happiness is at stake? Dorothy is entirely too young to be allowed to decide in a case of this kind —"

"She is three years older than you were when I fell in

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love with you, Claudia," said the husband, the ghost of a smile touching his lips. Mrs. Wentworth did not relish her own argument being used against her.

"Who is this Randolph Carew anyhow?" she burst forth angrily. "What do we know of him, or concerning him? What is his religion, his family, his prospects? A society man, I suppose, with a monocle and a lisp! Great heavens, it is enough to drive a mother mad! I am astonished at you, John. Why not write to the gentleman at once, and invite him here? Tell him the first applicant for our daughter will be the first to get her."

"He is not waiting for an invitation, Claudia," said John Wentworth, patiently. "He is coming without it."

"A bold, impudent creature — what they call dashing nowadays!" cried Mrs. Claudia. "With a smirk and a smile and a smooth tongue — don't I know them? Oh, what fools girls are, the best of them! I tell you, John Wentworth, *you* can do just as you please — but I shall never give my consent to any such proceeding."

"Ah, Claudia," said the Professor, and now the note in his voice mollified her anger. Petulant at times and cross she might be, but the first inkling of pain, either mental or physical, on the part of one she loved, restored her to her own well-balanced, comforting self. "That is my only hope — that we will not like him well enough to give our consent. But then? Haven't you seen the change in Dorothy since she came back from that visit? You're a woman, and her mother. You should be sharp at such things."

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"I thought it was Donald," she faltered.

"So did I, so did I. And even when I thought it Donald, none the less did I feel it. Think now what it is to see our little girl's heart gone out to a stranger — one whom we have never heard of before, whose face we have never seen."

"Oh, John, it seems impossible! How has it happened? Poor Donald!"

"Poor Donald!" echoed the father, softly. He twisted the fatal letter in his fingers once more and sighed. "Something tells me this is fate, dear wife. We must try to get used to the idea now — we can not say anything against a man we have never seen. And, Claudia —"

"Yes?"

"Go to the poor child. I know she is longing to tell you all about it — but she is afraid. Go to her, that's a good woman. Make her realize that her parents love her too dearly to put anything in the way of her happiness."

And with these words he left the room for his study. But he did not glance at books or specimens — only sat at his desk and stared at the two letters: his boy Donald's and Randolph Carew's — wondering, with an ache somewhere in his kindly breast, how the whole thing would turn out, and whether it were true, really true, that the darling of his life was destined to drift away from him.

Ah! If the man who comes to claim the hand of a

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beloved daughter could look, for one brief instant, into her father's heart. And if the girl who goes to him could see with her mother's eyes, just for a single hour! It would make all their after life the happier and the more blessed.

Mrs. Wentworth did not intend to be lenient with Dorothy. She felt ill used, indeed, and sore, and much put out. But she went to her, nevertheless. The girl was kneeling before the shrine of the Madonna in the corner of her room, her hands folded, her face raised, her whole attitude one of humility and meekness. Dorothy had never seemed either humble or meek to her mother.

"What are you doing, Dolly?" she asked sharply.

The girl sprang to her feet, startled. She did not change color, for her soul had been wrapped in prayer, and the elevation of spirit lingered with her still. She went to her mother's side, and took her hand with a confiding gesture that spoke more than any words.

"I want to do — what is right," she said softly. "I want God's help, mother. And I do not want you or father to be unhappy." Her eyes were full of tears. "It has been hard enough this last few months when I was trying to forget. Mother, won't you let me tell you now?"

Mrs. Wentworth did not speak — only nodded. The tears in Dorothy's eyes made her own fill. So Dorothy put her arm about her and told her the story of her first meeting with the man who was now her lover, and of Aunt Joan.

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"I thought I had forgotten," said Dorothy. "I really thought I had forgotten until Donald spoke to me that day we went out together. Mother, I knew then I could never forget — never. There is nothing I would not do to make you and father happy. But when Donald asked me, and I saw the difference, I couldn't say yes, mother, when I knew there was some one else. You wouldn't have had me say yes to him, would you?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Wentworth. "Only I was so sure, Dolly. I feel very badly indeed over this. It seemed such a comfortable, happy arrangement — and Donald would always be good to you — we shouldn't worry about your future."

"Wait," said Dorothy, smiling, "wait until you see *him*, mother. I don't think you'll worry about me then."

"He'll have to take his time — if everything is satisfactory, I mean," said Mrs. Wentworth. "A year at least, Dolly!"

"Oh, marriage!" Dorothy shivered a little. "I don't mean to think of marriage — not yet."

"What will Donald say?" asked the mother, gloomily.

CHAPTER IX

DOROTHY'S LOVER

THE tenth was the following day. Randolph Carew meant to lose no time evidently. Two trains stopped at Wentworth — one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and the Professor, deciding that the first train was too early, drove over in time for the second. There were not many visitors at Wentworth the beginning of May, so he felt he would not have any difficulty in recognizing Mr. Carew. He teased Dorothy a little, and invited her to accompany him, well aware beforehand that no inducement would persuade her to do so.

He advanced without any hesitancy to greet the tall young man who stood, bag in hand, looking about him, as the cars steamed out of the station, noting, even as he walked, the courtliness of the handsome features, the erectness of the well-knit form. There was scarcely need for introduction. Dorothy's own gray eyes shone out of her father's face, and involuntarily the stranger took a step toward him.

"You are Mr. Carew?"

"I am. And you?"

"John Wentworth, at your service, sir."

They shook hands then, and without pretending to

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disguise the fact, stood scrutinizing each other with intent, searching gaze. Calm blue eyes, features clear-cut as a cameo, the face of a patrician, whose chief expression was, in repose, a certain haughtiness. All this John Wentworth saw, and more, for now only its charm was evident in the smiling lips, the pleased glow that lit up his whole countenance, a winning magnetism that made Dorothy's father clasp his hand the closer. He in return looked at good John Wentworth, the man whom it was impossible to see or to speak to without being touched to broader sympathy and nobler emotions.

"I am happy to meet you, Mr. Wentworth." The words rang true — civility alone did not prompt them.

"And I you, Mr. Carew."

That was all. Smiling, the Professor led the way to the carriage, the guest entered it, and with his bag tucked in at his feet in genuine country style, Randolph Carew started on his way to his sweetheart's home, seated beside his sweetheart's father.

Not a word was said of the subject that had brought him, but, easily and without effort, the younger man enticed the other into a flow of conversation that lasted all the way. It was dinner time when they reached the house. Mrs. Wentworth gave him cordial greeting — and he, looking at her for the "dowdy country woman" Aunt Joan had described, was agreeably disappointed. Dorothy, very proud and reserved, bore herself well indeed, as the Professor noted exultantly. She gave Mr. Carew her hand — her father did not know that her

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fingers were cold as ice — and introduced Ethel Lorimer. After that Mr. Wentworth took his guest to the room set aside for him, and Mrs. Wentworth departed to give a last glance at the spotless dinner table. Dorothy, followed by Ethel, went out on the veranda. No words passed between them for a long while. Then Ethel laid her hand on Dorothy's arm.

"He is very nice," she said. "He has a good face, Dolly."

"Thank you," said Dorothy. "I wonder —" and she smiled half-heartedly. "Father is so sudden in his likes and dislikes. I wonder if father likes him."

"I think Aunt Claudia does," said Ethel, comfortingly.

"Do you? Really? I suppose I am a coward. It seemed as if she were so cold. Mother can be so cold at times."

"I know. But she looked pleased when she went away. Honestly, she did, Dorothy. Besides, it's too soon to tell. It wouldn't be fair to judge him. I like him — indeed I do like him, Dolly."

Dorothy's face brightened.

"You make me happier," she said. "Perhaps it is just my imagination. I'm sorry he's so handsome — mother doesn't like good-looking men. It isn't his looks, Ethel. Wait. You will see."

"We think Donald handsome," said Ethel, softly. "He is far and away better looking than our Don."

Dorothy's face lost its brightness then; a shadow seemed to dim the light in her eyes.

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"Don't, Ethel, please — don't mention Donald's name any more than you can help — especially now. I want to be happy to-night — oh, so happy — and I am. But if I think of Donald — Poor Donald! I am so sorry. Why couldn't he have fallen in love with you, Ethel?"

A wave of crimson flushed the girl's cheeks.

"Because there is only one Dorothy," she said. "There is no one like you, dear, no one in the world."

"Yes, there is, and better," said Dorothy, petulantly. "You're a hundred per cent better than I am in every way. And you're very pretty and sweet, and every one who knows you thinks you a perfect little angel. I wish my disposition were one tenth as amiable."

"Amiable!" said Ethel. "You need not care to be amiable, Dorothy — you are so original that no one would ever miss that quality in you or know you did not have it."

Dorothy opened her eyes wide.

"I wish Father Preston could hear you," she said. "Who taught you to say a thing like that?"

"I heard Father Preston say it first," laughed Ethel.

* * * * *

The polished grace that had won for Randolph Carew a host of friends; the fund of sparkling conversation; the gentle deference that marked his bearing when he spoke to or of a woman; his habit of including every single person in the room in his address, won the secret

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liking of Dorothy's parents. For the time being they were inclined to be hypercritical. He surely realized this, but if so he did not show it. He was self-possessed, unflurried, calm. Nevertheless, even for this man, used to the ways of men and women, it must have been something of an ordeal. Like other ordeals it had to end — and it did, to his credit.

Nothing was said of the object of his visit even then — not a word, though it filled the minds of all. But the next day he sought the interview with Professor Wentworth — the interview he had come for. It was a grave moment indeed. The father had many things of which to speak, and many questions to ask. Randolph Carew seemed to anticipate each one. His credentials were above reproach, his family name an honored one, his position that of a society man who had more money than he knew what to do with. He had no profession, he answered, smiling a little when John Wentworth asked him the question. It was hardly necessary to add that he never expected to have need of a profession.

"Granted that," said John Wentworth, slowly, "I look at things a little differently. Our child is used to the comforts of life, rather than its luxuries. We have done our best —"

"She shall have everything wealth can give her," cried Randolph Carew, impetuously. The Professor held up his hand.

"Pardon me — you consider that an advantage? Do you know Dorothy well, and think that such a motive

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would weigh with her in choosing her lover, her husband? Wealth, luxury — what are these if other things are not equal?"

Randolph Carew was silent. John Wentworth bent forward, a look of intense feeling on his fine face.

"So far you have said nothing to me about religion. What is your belief? You are aware, of course, that in Dorothy you will marry a girl of strong religious feelings, a strict and rigid Catholic?" he asked.

"I understand that perfectly," said Carew. "And I am glad of it. As for me, I have no feeling for or against any religion. I was brought up a Baptist. I do not attend any church. I believe in God, in one supreme Creator of the universe — who can attend to His business without interference on our part. As a sect the Roman Catholics have long had my sincerest admiration — going even to the extent of attending their services on numerous occasions, and I have a number of friends devoutly attached to the faith. I do not say this to prepossess you in my favor," he went on frankly, "but to show you how little I would interfere with my wife in the practice of her religious duties. I understand just how strict the Catholic Church is in this regard, and I can assure you that I bore it in mind when I wrote to you asking for an interview. Dorothy, if I am fortunate enough to win her, shall do exactly as she pleases. Her religious scruples shall always have the greatest consideration from me."

"Have you ever thought seriously of our Church?"

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"Beyond having a warm admiration and respect for it, no."

"Warm admiration and respect? Not sufficiently warm to ask yourself why it is worthy of both?"

"No," answered Randolph Carew. "We will waive that, Professor. You would not want me to forswear myself? You would not want me to tell you that I am willing to become a Catholic because of Dorothy? If I can get her in no other way," impetuously, "and if you insist upon it, I shall go through with what will be, to me, merely a form. But I will not promise to live up to tenets that I can not understand, and do not want to."

"The Catholic Church wouldn't take you under those conditions," said the Professor. He was not displeased by this confession of indifferentism. On the contrary, there was a ring of honest purpose in the young man's speech.

"Men much worse than you express yourself to be have been converted to the true faith," he said then. "I was a skeptic — without much belief in anything when Madam Claudia got hold of me. I consider myself as stanch an adherent of the Church of Rome to-day as any I know — stancher than some who, perhaps, have had the advantages over me of birth and training in their belief."

"Is that so?" asked Carew, smiling. "You understand then, Professor? If Dorothy is willing, you will —"

"Say nothing against it," completed Professor Went-

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worth. "I don't see how I can, in conscience. But —" he paused a moment now. "Man to man, together, Mr. Carew," his voice took a deeper meaning, "I brought Claudia Lorimer from as loving a home as Dorothy will leave to-day — and leave it I feel she will. But there were many sisters and brothers after her, who could help their parents to forget the loss of one from out the family circle. We did not think of that then, in our thoughtless youth, Carew — we did not think of that. Now, when Dorothy goes, we are alone — almost childless we may say."

"I understand," said Carew, his fine face very gentle, "I understand, sir."

"We made many mistakes, my dear wife and I. But, and this is the greatest thing of all, we made them together. Now we can laugh over them together. We had many faults — she had hers, and I had mine. But when two people truly love, the faults of the one merge into those of the other, so that what one has, the other has. Our Dorothy is noble, pure, high-spirited — a little stubborn, perhaps, but love can always lead her. Her life is a great white page, on which there is no blemish, no shadow, nothing that can ever come between you. Men are foolish at times, Mr. Carew, and do foolish things — especially men who have, like you, more money than — pardon me — is good for them. Forget now, for one instant of time, that I am the father of the girl you seek to marry — think only that I am your own, and answer one question I would put to you."

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"Yes?" said Carew, in a low tone.

"Is there anything in your past you would not want your pure young wife to know? Anything you would want more completely erased from the sheet you are about to turn down now forever? And if there is, may I help you? Will you let me advise you, guide you, assist you as an old man might a dear son just starting out into a new and unexplored country?"

The silence that fell between them was a strange one. The Professor did not look at him — he thought it kinder not to, for fear of a possible embarrassment. And so he missed the light that shone suddenly in the young man's eyes — the light of great longing. He hesitated, even opened his lips to speak — then his fingers gripped tightly about those of the elder.

"Sir!" he said, in a choked voice. "Sir, I thank you — from the bottom of my heart, I thank you for those words. I will not deny that I have been foolish, that I have committed even grave errors. But there is not a shadow to touch your daughter's future. They are things better left in the oblivion of past years. The night I first saw her she came to me like a revelation, and I assure you that before I touched her hand I looked at my own, wondering if it were clean enough to hold hers, even for that single moment. Sir, it was not a clean hand, then, and you might shrink from me did you know all. But I swore it should be clean forever after. And then —"

"And then —" said the Professor, in his gentle voice.

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"Then I lost her," he said huskily. "After two weeks I lost her and I — dared not question why. I did not know what had happened to me. As the days went by I told myself that it was a dream, that the dream had passed, and that now I should forget. I was miserable — desperate by turns. Sir, if I have a soul — if there is a soul in me — Dorothy Wentworth found it and wakened it. Good God!" his face worked, "to think that she has been lost to me, and that I have found her — that she will belong to me! Oh, if you could see my heart and realize how that heart has need of her!"

Now, if any one had told Randolph Carew that he was capable of such an outburst he would have smiled in his sarcastic way and passed the accusation by, deeming it unworthy of a retort. Face to face with good John Wentworth had roused his manhood — brought him to the heights. John Wentworth suddenly understood. With keen foreknowledge, he realized his daughter's mission.

"I have congratulated myself, at that, as being a little better than my fellows," went on Randolph Carew. "Listening to you, I know that I am unworthy to ask her even to care for me. But on my honor as a man I shall do by her as you yourself would do, and may God curse me if I betray my trust!"

The words bore all the solemnity of an oath; the sincerity in the eyes that met his own moved good John Wentworth to even greater warmth of heart.

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"There is no more, then," he said. "There is some one whom we — my wife and I — thought we be lucky enough to get Dorothy. That is D Mackenzie. You will hear the name often enough we have not spoken of him since you came, out of our great grief. It is only right to tell you that we greatly grieved at first — it was very hard to think our boy was not to be really ours. But he will get it. The ways of fate are strange ways, Mr. C. We must lose our little girl after all."

"Do not say that," began the proud Randolph C. in a hesitating voice. "Perhaps — when I have put myself — you will give me just a little of the affection I should be glad if you could like me, Mr. Wentworth." "I do like you; I do like you!" cried the Professor, laughing then, jovially. "You remind me so of my own young days. Well, well, Dolly won't be as happy as I have been, I guess."

There was magnetism even in the young fellow's blundering speech — the most flurried he had made in his life — that charmed the simple-minded man. So he escorted him to the door and shut it behind him, well content with Dorothy's lover, knowing that he would not have far to go to find the girl herself.

Nor did he. She came to meet him, blushing a little under the joyous glance he gave her.

"You have seen father?" she asked.

"Yes, I have seen him. Everything will be all right if you consent now, Dorothy."

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"And he said — He spoke to you about our religion?"

"He spoke of it, certainly. But how cold you are, little girl! This isn't the Dorothy for whom I have been longing and waiting three dreary, weary months. Come, and sit here with me. I want to show you something."

He drew her down to the sofa beside him and pulled a notebook out of his pocket. Opening it, he took from its leaves a little rose, faded and brown and dry.

"Do you remember, Dorothy? Do you remember what I said when you gave me this?"

She turned her face away.

"I said I would keep it until I saw you again," he continued, very gently. "Until I saw you again! I did not know it would be so long, dear."

"Nor I," she murmured.

"That next afternoon you would not see me, the servant said. I meant to ask you then what I am asking you to-day. When I called the following morning they told me you were gone home. Gone home! I was stupefied, Dorothy. I could not understand. I tried to, after that, and I laughed at myself often. But in the end I had to find out, you see."

"How?"

"Cousin Joan told me."

"Everything?"

"Everything. You don't believe that trash about Margaret Montresor, do you?"

"I don't know. Will you please tell me? Perhaps then — I had rather you would tell me."

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"It is not true, then, that she likes me — and all that. She's really a good, warm-hearted girl, Dorothy. Horace Montresor was an old friend of mine, and I was with them a good deal until he died. People said I would marry his widow. That's all, Dorothy."

"But Aunt Joan —"

"Voices the sentiments of the rest," he said, contemptuously. "Her opinions are merely echoes — and not often accurate ones." (It was well Aunt Joan could not hear him!) "She is very angry at you."

"I know it," said Dorothy, with a little laugh.

"We must make our peace with her."

"Why?" asked the girl. Aunt Joan was a sore subject. "I have no wish to make my peace with her."

"But it is because of her we know each other. And I am grateful, dear."

Dorothy shrugged her shoulders.

"We are talking in the abstract," he went on happily. "I really have heard nothing definite. You know that your father has given you to me, if you will allow me to take you, little girl."

"What an absurd way of putting it." She smiled, blushing rosy red.

"You will marry me, sweetheart? There is no one else for me in the whole world —"

"But I am scarcely able to grasp it all yet," she said hurriedly, trying to evade direct answer to his question. "And there's something else I must speak of before — There's Donald."

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"Donald?"

"Yes; Donald Mackenzie. He asked me, Randolph. Of course I couldn't. And —" Her head was bent. The words became indistinct.

"Well! what is it? what is it?"

"He kissed me."

"Oh, he did?"

"Yes. It wasn't my fault." She looked at him pleadingly. "He was so heartbroken — And after a while I couldn't be angry at him, though I was at first."

He put his arm about her and drew her close to him.

"Lily-maid Dorothy — little white soul," he said, his voice shaking. "You couldn't be blamed for that — and I don't mind. As if I minded Donald!"

"No?" she asked, doubtfully.

"No," he answered, frankly. "If my regard for you could grow any more than it is, it would be augmented by what you have just told me. There are few like you, Dorothy Wentworth."

"No, no," she said hastily. "I am proud and obstinate — and cross, too; at times really cross. But I try to be true to myself — and to those I love."

"True?" he breathed the word. He bent over, pushing the soft hair from her forehead, looking deep into her eyes. And looking, the expression of his whole face changed. The light and happiness left it. The thin nostrils dilated as if he were in pain. "True? Dorothy, girl, what is truth?"

She was frightened then and caught his arm nervously.

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"Truth!" in a tone of bitterness. "Truth! the rock upon which the world has wrecked itself!"

"I do not understand," said Dorothy. "You doubt — me —"

"Doubt you, *you*? Look at me."

Obediently she raised her eyes.

"The day I doubt you will be the day on which all ends for me. The day I doubt you will mean that heaven itself can lie. The day I doubt you, girl, will mean there is no faith, no hope, no heaven — nothing but despair."

Her eyes darkened and flashed; her lips curled.

"Doubt is not always deserved," she said. "Without reason or rhyme it creeps into the human heart. It would frighten me to think that a single doubt would mean such dreadful things to you. I should be afraid, always —"

"Ah, child, you do not understand!"

She thought of Donald — of his expression when he used the selfsame words to her. Her brows contracted.

"You shall be my goddess of truth," said her lover. "My little true-eyed, loving goddess — and I shall have no other belief save in you —"

"Do not speak so," she whispered. "You do not know what you are saying. You see, my happiness is not a perfect one. Clouded at the very outset, Randolph. We are not one in faith."

He held her more closely still.

"Teach me," he said. "Teach me, and what you

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say I shall believe. Tell me now what I have come so far to hear — what I have hungered for these last few months, nay, all my life, until truth came to me. Dorothy, Dorothy, I love you, my little sweetheart!”

She laid her head on his breast without a word.

CHAPTER X

DONALD MACKENZIE'S INSPIRATION

"You'll oblige me, Donald, by calling on Wyndon some day this week — I am sending you his address for that purpose. Knox has not discovered anything, or if he has, will give me no information, and I am strongly inclined to throw up the whole matter, especially since I hear that Wyndon is confined to the house. He resigned his position a week ago and, according to reports, has been ill since that time, wretchedly ill. I am head over heels in business, trying to catch up — you know where. Have almost done so. Get a look at Wyndon, will you? He's an old fool to fret. Tell him so for me. But I am actually worried. He's been queer lately. Shouldn't be a bit surprised if his mind gave out."

Donald shrugged his shoulders when he finished reading the hastily penned note, wondering why William Wentworth persisted in dragging him into the affair. The feeling that he was destined to be mixed up in it still clung to him so that he had avoided seeking further knowledge of it. Besides, let him argue with himself as he might, his sympathies were with Wyndon. Why,

Donald Mackenzie's Inspiration

he could not explain, and it was because he could not justify his own instinct that he desired to banish the subject from him altogether.

He thought of writing a few lines to Uncle William now, pleading business in return. But he dismissed the thought at once. The older man, despite his multiplicity of cares these last few weeks, had found time to remember his brother's foster son. He had sent him letters of introduction to the leading builders in the city, and any work the young architect had in prospect now he owed to Uncle William. It would look decidedly ungrateful to refuse him such a trifling favor.

And then he asked himself why he objected to it? What was his reason? And if he could not give a reason, why did he demur? Surely there was nothing formidable in being asked to call on a man — say five minutes, and then spend another five minutes writing a report of how he found him. Donald would have done more than that for a stranger.

But there was no room for mystery in his frank nature — he would be open and above board always, in his dealings with all men, let the consequences be what they might. And now he felt that he was groping in the dark. He did not like it. Wyndon's evident suffering, his fight against the suspicion directed so plainly toward him, aroused Donald's warmest sympathies. But, on the other hand, to offset this, was the conversation he had overheard that evening in the theater. And this conversation put the man for whom he was sorry in such a

Donald Mackenzie's Inspiration

bad light that he wanted to draw away from him and to keep away from him.

Well, if the thing were done, 'twere best done quickly, he decided at last. He had leisure now. He would call on George Wyndon and have it over. Fifteen minutes later he rang the doorbell of the small, three-storied brick house that was George Wyndon's home.

George Wyndon himself came to let him in, opening the door a very little way and peering at him uncertainly through his glasses with a questioning stare.

"How do you do?" cried Donald, cheerfully. "Don't you know me, Mr. Wyndon?"

"Er — yes." He hesitated. Then seeing the outstretched hand he placed his nervous fingers in it, letting the door swing wide. "Yes. It's Mr. Mackenzie, isn't it? I haven't seen you in a long time, Mr. Mackenzie. It's quite a long time, I am sure. Won't you step in? My daughter will like to meet you. You have been busy? I am very busy now. At home, though. Don't go down to the bank any more. The work worried me. It was getting too much. I felt tired. I am growing old, I guess. I scarcely remembered you at first. It is such a great while — since I have seen anybody I know. Everybody is so busy. Work. Work is a great thing, isn't it? It keeps the wheels in motion."

The rambling talk, the incoherent manner, above all, the appearance of the man, made Donald's heart ache.

"I have been visiting Miss Wentworth — Miss Dorothy," he said, smiling cordially. "I have a message

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from her to you and your daughter, Mr. Wyndon." He hoped he might be forgiven the white fib. It was the first thing that occurred to him, and he knew Dorothy would have sent a message had she anticipated that he would see the Wyndons.

"Miss Dorothy? Oh, I know Miss Dorothy well. That is good, indeed — it pleases me to hear from her," said the man. "Won't you come into the parlor and sit down? Beatrice will be glad to listen to anything you can tell her of Miss Dorothy."

Donald followed him, resolved so to bear himself and so to talk as to give this poor fellow a little more hope in life, to rouse his interest, to promise him trust, belief, support. Every impulse of the heart John Wentworth had helped to train; every kindly feeling fostered by the noble example of the man who had been to him a father, stirred within him, rose to the surface, impelled him, by an irresistible force, to the sustaining of this vessel of weaker clay — at least to prove himself until the truth became evident — as it must in the end. That he was guilty was entirely out of the question. There was no guilt in this man. So he walked after him into the parlor. He wondered if George Wyndon remembered their last conversation?

Their last conversation!

The memory of it darkened the young man's face and tightened his lips. Who could explain it? Why, when he had persuaded himself of Wyndon's innocence, did those whispered words occur to him with such con-

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demning force? Another wave of feeling swept over him — this time of disgust. How could he believe in him? He would have made, without an instant's hesitation, some excuse to get away then, had he not been inside the parlor door.

There was a young girl in the center of the room. She heard them enter — her father's stumbling footsteps, followed by a firmer tread. She turned her face whence the sound came, and stood with parted lips, expectant, listening. Donald paused, a little startled as he met her eyes, wondering why she stared at him so unblinkingly. George Wyndon went to her side and took her hand in his. She smiled into her father's face, the trusting, loving smile of a gentle child. And then Donald, looking with appreciative gaze, marveled at the great sweetness of the fair face — almost transparent in its pallor; at the glow in the deep-blue eyes; at the shining glory of gold that clustered about her temples.

"This is Mr. Mackenzie, Beatrice," said George Wyndon.

His voice was low, but no longer weak, or nervous, or hesitating; his shoulders were straight again, his head erect. He led his daughter forward.

"He comes from Miss Dorothy — he has brought you a message from her," said the father.

"Oh!" she cried out in a rapturous voice. "From Dorothy? And you have seen her lately, Mr. Mackenzie?" She hesitated almost imperceptibly over the

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name, not being quite sure of it. She held out both her hands impulsively. "She is well, I hope? Well and happy? It is so long since I have heard her speak — I wish she were coming to us again. She was only here three times in all," she went on, "but I can never forget her."

"Nor she you," said Donald, pleasantly, pressing the small hands she had given him and releasing them. The girl was listening for the sound of his voice — her head bent forward. "She spoke to me of you, asking me if I had met you." He could not bring himself to invent any message under the directness of those wonderful eyes. "She was sorry that I had not," he went on, a little confused. "And now I have come to satisfy myself and to satisfy her; to tell you how she looked —"

"That is it," said the girl. "Father told me — and Dorothy tried. But she did not do herself justice. She is very beautiful, isn't she, Mr. Mackenzie?"

"Very, very beautiful," he answered.

"I know she must be — but her soul is so wonderful that I can not seem to grasp her outside loveliness," said the girl, smiling.

Donald looked at her, rather puzzled. Beatrice Wyndon drew a chair forward.

"You know, perhaps, when Dorothy is coming to New York again? I can not like many people — but I liked her. We understood each other, almost at once. It was marvelous! Father, too! He was worse than I; indeed he was!"

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Again she laughed — a little ripple under her breath — and Donald's heart, warming to this beautiful, soft-voiced girl, praising the one he loved, found vent in speech. Before he realized it he was telling her of Wentworth, of Dorothy's father and mother, of Dorothy herself, and even of Ethel Lorimer. Every once in a while he addressed George Wyndon, pleased to notice that the harassed look had left the man's pale face, and that he could smile a little over his daughter's enthusiasm. Donald was not given overmuch to speech, nor to talking of himself. But this present moment he strove to make an entertaining one. He succeeded. A half hour slipped by — an hour; still he lingered, fascinated by the girl's bright and charming manner. He interrupted himself at last with an exclamation of alarm.

"I allowed myself ten minutes!" he cried. "And it is an hour or more! What will you think of me —"

"Oh, it has been so pleasant," said Beatrice Wyndon. "It is not an hour, surely?"

"I am afraid it is, and past. I must go." He paused — then looked at George Wyndon. "Uncle William wishes to be remembered to you," he said cordially. "He has not seen you in a week —"

Wyndon, with a frightened gesture, clutched his arm, and laid his finger across his lips imploringly. Donald gave a glance at the girl. There was a look of astonishment on her face.

"Not seen father in a week?" she began. "I thought you said you saw him yesterday —"

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"Yes, dear, Mr. Mackenzie means, perhaps, that I won't see him in a week. Is that it, Mr. Mackenzie? He is going away? For a week?"

Donald sat bewildered, looking from one to the other — from the girl's unconscious face to her father's white one. What was this — more mystery?

"He said something about a week," stammered the young man then. "Perhaps I misunderstood."

"Mr. Wentworth is so kind to father — but you can tell him it doesn't do father one bit of good to be home — he won't rest anyhow. Sometimes his voice is tired — oh, so tired! And he walks like an old, old man, who hasn't any life left. I wish I could help him. If I could see I would send him away from the long rows of figures he counts up day after day in those books he's got upstairs, and do them all myself."

Donald gave a violent start. He had totally forgotten that Beatrice Wyndon was blind. Now he sat staring at her, studying the fair face, the shining eyes, whose light came from the pure soul animating them. Pity, so great as to be pain, overwhelmed him.

"I had — forgotten," he said in a low voice.

The girl heard him. A little wave of color swept over her cheeks. She laughed gleefully.

"Many people do — isn't it wonderful! Just think! You have been here a whole hour. And you never knew!"

"I never would unless you told me. It does not hurt you to speak of it?" hesitatingly.

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"Hurt me? I even consider it a great blessing at times. It leaves everything to the imagination. And those I love are so — so very beautiful. I can't describe it. It would take too long. Voices tell me so much. I know at once. A voice to me is an embodied soul."

"Beatrice never forgets a voice," said George Wyndon, with piteous eagerness.

"That is true. Voices are like music. You listen — and some you are glad to listen to, if they are not heard too often. Others are pretty, jingling, light — easily forgotten. Others are deepest harmonies — chords of purest melody, that one grows to love by constant repetition. Dorothy's was one of those, Mr. Mackenzie."

"Then you judge your friends by the sweetness of their tones —"

"Oh, no — no, indeed. The sweetest voices are not always the most pleasant."

"Tell me," he said then, smiling. "What does mine say to you?"

She colored a little.

"You would make a very good friend," she said.

"That is not all. Please go on," he pleaded.

"And you might not be quite just to those you did not care for."

"That is true," said Donald. "That is very true, Miss Wyndon."

"I am sure it is. I have only been puzzled once. It was one night — some weeks past. A gentleman came to see father —"

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"Mr. Mackenzie has to go," said George Wyndon, quickly. "It is getting late — he may have some —"

"Not at all," interposed Donald. "I am more than delighted to listen." He did not like the pallor that shut down over Wyndon's face. He noticed that the man's hands clutched nervously at the arms of his chair.

"Father has never seemed quite the same to me since that night," went on the girl, musingly. "He had worked so hard that day, he told me, and he came home with one of his bad headaches. You remember, father?"

"Mr. Mackenzie, Beatrice — he is not interested."

"I am, indeed I am," said Donald Mackenzie, very quietly. "Go on, Miss Wyndon."

"What is the matter, father?"

"Nothing, dear."

"Your voice sounds strange. He just hates me to speak about that night. Yes, you do — you know you do —"

"It is such a foolish story, Beatrice. Mr. Mackenzie will laugh at you."

"No, no," said Donald, hastily, "I will not laugh."

"It was so late when he came," went on the girl. "After nine. I let him in myself. He asked where father was. Do you know, his voice frightened me? I could scarcely tell him that father was in bed because of that strange feeling of terror. And yet it was a nice voice. He said he knew his room and would go to him. I could not have prevented him. After that he came down again with father. They both went out together."

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She frowned a little. "I was standing inside the parlor door, oh, so afraid!" She laughed. "I thought my father would never return again."

Wyndon was bent almost double, his head upon his hands, a picture of absolute misery.

"Why are you so quiet?" asked the girl. "Don't you think it was strange? Such a peculiar voice — so odd, so powerful, so silky, and so smooth. I would not want to hear that voice again."

Donald's brows were contracted, his eyes narrowed to fine points. Wyndon raised his head, shrinking from the concentrated scorn in the young man's face, dropped his head again, and seemed to shrivel into a little old man.

"Perhaps your father has heard it often," said Donald, with curling lips.

Beatrice laughed — and at the free unconsciousness of it the father quivered as though she had struck him. He was a pitiable sight then — on the verge of collapse. But Donald had no mercy in his heart.

"Father says not — that is the best or worst of it," she said simply. "He declares he saw no one — that no one came — that he never left his bed. I have told it over and over," musingly, "just how it happened. He went out at ten o'clock and returned at a quarter of twelve. I know, for I counted every time the quarters struck! And yet father says he did not get up out of bed — did not go out. It really troubles him, I believe."

A long, shuddering sigh passed George Wyndon's lips. The girl's face turned, questioningly.

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"What is it — you are tired, dear? I shall not say any more about it then —"

"Go on," said Donald Mackenzie. "Is there more, Miss Beatrice?"

"No more, except my own conjectures."

"And they were?"

"I can't put them into words. Do you think —" Beatrice quickly turned her head toward her father. "Can I say it, father? Please let me say it?" and now the tone was a pleading one and so full of feeling that Donald realized that the subject worried her more than she pretended. "Mr. Mackenzie can help us, perhaps, dear?"

She waited for no reply to this, but spoke hurriedly:

"I thought since — the voice was so peculiar — so strong and so sweet — maybe — he could make father forget — You see, he may — It's such a foolish thing to say — you won't understand me. They probably just went for a walk — father's head may have been so bad that he does not remember — I have heard of people walking in their sleep —"

A groan burst from George Wyndon's lips.

"Even my own daughter!" he cried out, in tones of agony. "Even my own daughter! I shall go mad! I must be guilty! *I am* guilty! Even my own daughter —"

"*Father!*" The girl started to her feet, shaking violently. "Dearest father!"

Donald looked from one to the other of them. And as he turned from the miserable, sobbing man to the

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white-faced, pleading girl who was bending over him now almost in terror, a sudden light shot into his eyes. The thought that struck him was so forcible that it took his breath away. He sat still, collecting himself, his brain a little dazed. Then, with a leap and a bound, he was on his feet.

"I know it! I know it!" he shouted. "I know it! Wyndon — the butler — the butler — Felix Dunbar — Aunt Joan's butler —"

Wyndon raised his weary eyes, wondering, if he were capable of thought just then, if Donald Mackenzie had gone suddenly insane.

"Don't you understand, man? The butler knew of that consignment! He couldn't get at it without you! In some way he has hypnotized you. That accounts for the conversation I overheard. It must! I tell you, we shall solve the riddle yet."

He was elated, jubilant, too keenly engrossed in this seeming solution of the difficulty to look at the details that made it questionable. He put his hand on Wyndon's shoulder.

"I never could account for my belief in your innocence," he cried exultantly. "Never. But the belief was there. We shall make Knox open his eyes, Wyndon. We shall beat him at his own game. Brace up, now. Why, man alive, you've got everything in the world to live for. You've got to help me prove you innocent — you've got to help me, I tell you. Stupidity! Of course the butler knew!"

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But Wyndon was sobbing like a child — with weak, indrawn quivers that shook his whole frame, as only a man who has fought against black and bitter odds could weep. At the sound of it Donald remembered. With a look of pity on his face he turned to Beatrice.

"Comfort him," he said gently. "Comfort him. He will tell you all, and then you will know how much he has suffered. I am your friend against all the world now. Tell him that, too, and that I shall be here tomorrow. We'll talk it over then. And you will be better able to speak of it. Good night; good night."

The tears were standing in his own eyes. He left the room hurriedly.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE VALLEY OF DESOLATION

To describe Donald Mackenzie's state of mind as he strode rapidly away from the Wyndon domicile would take the better part of a long chapter. Out of the disappointment that had overwhelmed him when Beatrice Wyndon told her story; out of the contempt following that sensation, and which spoke from every disdainful feature of his face as the story grew, arose a great struggle with the gentler emotion, pity, as he looked upon the almost maddened victim of this mystery. Again his only opponent was himself — and this time he fought sternly, resolved to satisfy himself once for all; to decide that George Wyndon was or was not guilty, and then abide by that decision.

He could scarcely believe, at first, in the sudden thought that dawned upon him. That this was the solution he had not the slightest doubt, now; that it was an inspiration, that God had put it into his mind, deigning to make him the humble instrument that might help to clear an innocent man, he also believed, reverently. And he thought, too, that in taking the burden upon his strong young shoulders he would save

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George Wyndon's life. He knew he would save his reason — for the man's brain was tottering even now. It was time to lighten the black shadows that threatened to engulf him or condemn him forever.

So Donald, with his brave heart on fire, set out on his homeward way, pondering on the light that had come to him, making him rejoice as if it were his own concern. He had been drawn to the pale-faced, blue-eyed girl who sat and talked to him of Dorothy, his sweetheart. And how glad his Dorothy would be to hear this — he must write to her to-night and tell her. He could see the tears in her soft gray eyes — he could hear the tender messages she would send across the space that intervened — words of comfort and good cheer to her friend — words of hope to him. She would praise him a little, maybe, he thought, his dark cheek kindling. And he would repudiate the praise, yet warm his heart at the gentle flame — for was it not Dorothy, only Dorothy, who could commend in words that he desired to hear? Was it not Dorothy, only Dorothy, who set the criterion for his daily actions? So would he encompass her with noble deeds that people would be obliged to look beyond his meager powers to the force impelling him. And they would find . . . a gray-eyed girl, soft of voice and mien, with the love of her Creator in her heart and the purity of the angels enthroned upon her brow.

His eyes were a little dim when he reached his own room, and he smiled over what he called his sentimentality. He lighted the gas, and going to the wardrobe took

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out his evening suit. He would have dinner, call on Uncle William, and try to discover what he could about Aunt Joan's clever rascal of a butler. He blamed himself for being so remiss. He had known — Dorothy had told him — the man's name. But while he had not forgotten the circumstance, he knew that Knox was on the trail — he had given him the name that had come to him so mysteriously that night. It was the detective's place to unearth the one who was guilty in the end, and get the credit for it.

He was standing before the mirror when some one tapped upon his door.

"Come in," he called out. The bell boy entered, carrying letters in his hand. A man followed him into the room. Donald, turning from the glass, questioningly, saw that it was Knox. An amused expression crept across his face.

"Hello, there!" he exclaimed. "Glad to see you. Where did you come from? Leave the letters on the table, Charlie. Thank you. How are things, Knox?"

"Pretty fair," answered Knox, in a pleasant voice. "Thought I'd run in. How long have you been back? A week?"

"Three," said Donald, briefly. He would have been vastly astonished at that moment had any one told him that not a single move of his had escaped the detective's observation — not only since his return to New York, but for the two weeks he had been away.

"Seen anybody we know, lately?"

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"I may have. Which particular 'anybody' do you mean?"

"Wyndon, for instance? Didn't you see Wyndon to-day?"

Donald was the least suspicious among mortals. But if Knox could disguise his face and keep it under control, the eagerness of the question jarred unpleasantly on the young man's nerves. He swung around full this time and looked Knox straight in the eyes.

"I did. Got any objection?"

"Not at all." Knox laughed, and pulled a chair toward him with an unconcerned air. "You are aware, of course, that Wyndon is under our surveillance. I saw you going in this afternoon. That's why I called."

Ashamed of the feeling that had prompted his curt question, Donald turned back to the table.

"You'll pardon me for keeping on dressing? I want to go to Mr. Wentworth's to-night. You see —"

He was shaking the black coat vigorously in his hands, passing his fingers over an imaginary crease in the shoulder. A small object fell to the floor with a chink. Stooping, he groped for it.

"It's about time something were done. Wyndon looks —"

He straightened up like a flash, almost bounced up, holding in his fingers a sapphire button set in old gold.

"Lamented shades of Julius Cæsar!" he cried, explosively. "Knox — for heaven's sake, Knox — Well, I'll be hanged!"

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The detective came over to him, curiously. Donald held the button in one hand, and with the other pointed to his cuffs, which, ready to put on, lay before him on the dressing table. There was a button in each — a sapphire set in old gold. Donald stared from the stone in his hand to the stones in his cuffs, the most bewildered expression of which the human countenance could be capable upon his just then. He could scarcely believe his senses. The detective, too, was evidently puzzled. He took the button from Donald, held it to the light, examining it carefully. Then he picked up Donald's cuffs, one after the other.

"What does it mean?" asked Donald.

"It means that you didn't lose your cuff button."

"I — didn't — lose — my — cuff button! There isn't another pair of cuff buttons in the world like mine. I'd stake my life on it!"

"You'd lose," said Knox, dryly. "You'd lose. It means that there's some one else lost that cuff button the night of the bank robbery; you only mislaid yours. And they're exactly the same."

Again Donald picked them up, comparing the size of the stones, the shape, the setting, the engraving. He shook his head.

"You've got another clue, Knox."

"Or lost one," said the detective, half disgusted.

"Lost one? Where does that come in?"

"You'll see later, perhaps. Will you let me have this cuff button? I promise to return it to you."

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"It must be one of my original pair," said Donald. "The last time I wore my dress suit I had these on. Evidently the one you have is my button, and one of these," pointing to his cuffs, "is the one you found. I'd like to return you that particular one if I could. Only you can't tell the difference, hang it! If I mixed the three together you couldn't tell t'other from which."

He was undoing the buttons even as he spoke.

Holding them close to the light again, he and the detective went over them once more. There was not a shade of difference. He laid the three together in his palm, laughing.

"I think it's as good a joke as any I have ever heard," he said. "Talk about mysteries — this is like fiction. Let's call it the inexplicable button."

Knox did not laugh. His brows were knitted.

"Well, here it is," said Donald. "And I wish you luck of its possession. Where on earth or how on earth you will find its mate goes beyond me. I assure you, Knox, I am as anxious now to hear all about it as you. It seems to thicken the plot a bit."

Knox took the proffered stone and placed it carefully in his wallet. His thoughts he kept to himself.

"You intend staying in the city?" he asked.

"For a while, yes," said Donald, in an abstracted manner. "How long or short a while I do not know."

"Well, I'll be getting on," said Knox. "I'll drop in sometime to-morrow evening — if you're home? That's good," as Donald nodded. "You may be able to give

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me a little help with Wyndon. I have tried to see him on several occasions, but it's no go. He's a pretty foxy —"

"Cut Wyndon out," said Donald, with more force than elegance. "Wyndon didn't lose that cuff button, did he? And he's as innocent as a babe unborn. I tell you, man, I know it. You're on an altogether wrong track."

"I'm not such a fool as to claim that Wyndon alone is guilty," said Knox, with a disagreeable smile. "He has a clever confederate — a man who knows enough to lay low and keep his mouth shut. But Wyndon makes a poor assistant in a case of this sort. He's weakening more and more each day."

"It's the weakness of innocence," said Donald, realizing suddenly what a colossal task he had undertaken in trying to set George Wyndon free from the suspicions of this shrewd, keen-eyed man.

"It is the weakness of a coward," cried Knox. Donald's coolness made him furious, with the anger that bursts out in spurts from people of his temperament. The young man turned his head in quick surprise, and Knox bit his lip.

"It gets me riled when I hear you and Mr. Wentworth stick up for him," he said, in a conciliatory manner. "I'm working all alone on this, you must remember. I haven't even the support of those who will be benefited by the discovery of the thief. But never mind. No man who wants to make a success of this trade should be

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discouraged by a few obstacles — not even a bank burglar," he laughed.

Donald smiled out of courtesy.

"Well, good night," said Knox. "If there's another button of this sort in the city I'll find it."

"Good night," said Donald. He went to the table in the center of the room and picked up his letters. One was from Dorothy. He threw the others aside and held this one, looking up at Knox, a little eager for his going, then. "Come in whether you find the cuff button or not."

"Thank you. I will." He closed the door behind him and walked along the corridor to the elevator. His face was puzzled and annoyed. He was thinking deeply and his thoughts were not pleasant.

Inside, Donald sank into the chair Knox had vacated, glancing at the clock to see how much time he had. One reading would never suffice for Dorothy's letter — a long one, he felt sure. The envelope seemed bulkier than usual. Besides that, his last communication to her had been a little warmer, a little more tender than the preceding ones. Perhaps she would respond in kind. His fingers grew cold. After all, she was Dorothy. His life was bound up in Dorothy. She must feel that. She must realize that no one could take his place in her heart. All the memories of her childhood, of the home she loved, of the simple, beautiful life she lived, bound her to him. By what ties? Surely those of deepest affection — she would find that out herself before long. Had she not called him "persistent Donald?" This suspense

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of his was but temporary. How could he expect her to know her own mind — his little sweetheart, who had never heard a word of love until his bold wooing frightened her? He spread the sheets out before him, and with a smile on his parted lips began to read:

“May 12.

“MY DEAR DONALD:

“I am writing to you myself before father or mother or any one else has a chance to, to tell you something I think you will want to hear from me first. I wish I could speak to you, Don — it would be so much easier for me. I hate to write, for written words are so very cold.

“Dear Don, when you asked me to marry you I was really and truly tempted to ‘think it over,’ as you bade me do — and had I known how father and mother loved the very thought of us two marrying I would have said ‘yes’ I think, and trusted to fate and the future — afterward, maybe, I could grow to love you.

“It’s well I did not. Just at that time I was awfully unhappy. And now, out of the depths of a great happiness I write to you, asking your sympathy, your affection, brother o’ mine, but the same sort of affection, dear, that I give you. A sister’s love, Don. The love we have had for each other since we were little children. Only that.

“It all happened three months ago when I was at Aunt Joan’s. There, the very first evening, I met a gentleman named Randolph Carew. He was always at Aunt Joan’s, and though every one was nice and attentive,

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and all that, he seemed different. I liked him *so* much even then, Don, and I was always glad to see him and to talk to him.

"I was very happy for a little while, and might never have found out why if Aunt Joan hadn't opened my eyes. What she said to me of Randolph Carew showed me that I loved him. Not the way I love you or father or any one else. This love was different. It made me so frightened and so ashamed that I could not bear to meet him any more, for fear that when he looked at me he would know.

"So I would not stay any longer, but came home right away. Aunt Joan was very angry and Randolph thought I did not care, and for that reason he was too proud to try to see me, and when he did not, then I thought he didn't care, either. But he did, all the time. And one day Aunt Joan told him all she had said to me about him, and then he knew that if he came himself — it might change things.

"Father was not pleased at all, nor mother. Both wanted you. But no one can help liking Randolph, and when they found out that his stepfather was Ernest Lyons, they warmed to him at once. Ernest Lyons went to college with your father and mine, Donald, and they were the best of friends. Isn't that curious? They had already begun to like him for himself, but that seemed to help matters wonderfully, and father is never tired speaking of old times to him, though Randolph, of course, doesn't know anything about those times.

"And you, Don? Why am I writing such a foolish,

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silly letter to you? Just because I want you to look into my heart and to know that you will add to my happiness by liking Randolph Carew, too. Like him for my sake, Don, dear — and then you will like him for his own.

“Great love, I think, makes one a little bit afraid. And I love him — I never could care for any one else as I care for him. It is not the love of a schoolgirl now, Don. There is no ‘gush’ to it. I want you to understand — you *must* understand; oh, won’t you try to, for my sake? Donald, Donald, I am crying now with very sorrow at the thought that I am paining you — that my dear brother’s heart is aching because of me. Oh, I can’t help it. I would, if I could. Nothing or no one should ever be unhappy because of me — if I could help it. But I can not help this. It is I, myself, part of me — a part of me I can not get away from.

“You told me I didn’t understand that day when you asked me, Don. Oh, I did — only too well. And that was why I couldn’t be angry when — I knew how badly you felt. Out of my own experience I knew it.

“Randolph went home yesterday and will call on you when he gets to New York. He is anxious to see our Donald. I know father has written — but I hope you will get this first.

“Your loving sister,

“DOLLY.

“P. S. — We are to be married the end of June. Will you like him for my sake, Donald? For my sake, *please?*”

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The last word was read; the last line. The name stared up at him — the pet name he had always used for her seemed, letter by letter, burning its way into his brain. His head sunk forward; his hands fell nerveless. He sat there ten minutes, twenty, a half hour. Time was forgotten. The clock on the mantel struck the hour of nine. It was too late to go to William Wentworth's then. But William Wentworth did not exist for him. He sat there, immovable, his eyes staring out straight before him, seeing nothing.

There came a knocking at the door. He did not answer it — he did not hear. The handle was turned softly and Charlie, the bell boy, entered, standing still at sight of that silent figure in the chair.

"Mr. Mackenzie," he called, deprecatingly.

Donald did not move. The boy thought he had fallen asleep, and coming over, shook his arm.

"Mr. Mackenzie," he said again.

Donald stirred and raised his eyes.

"Mr. Mackenzie, a gentleman downstairs would like to see you. He's sent up his card, sir."

Donald glanced at the card indifferently. It bore Randolph Carew's name. No curiosity moved him. His eyes traveled from the card to Dorothy's letter, and then moved again, restlessly, fastening themselves on the boy's really concerned face — for this boy liked Donald Mackenzie very much indeed. A gray whiteness had shut down over the dark skin — there was a film obscuring his vision.

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"Did you say I was in?" he asked dully.

"No, sir. I said I thought you were not in."

"Good. Tell him — tell him — tell — Say I am out of town."

"Yes, sir."

"Any message he has can be left with you. Tell him I said so."

"Yes, sir."

"I will not be back for a few days. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The boy went out, closing the door softly. It was the only way he could show his sympathy. "It is I, myself, part of me — a part of me I can not get away from." He laughed then. His head fell forward on the table, his cheek resting on her letter, touching the words that had made his future barren. He was not conscious of much pain. The weight of this blow crushed him to the earth. There was no ambition in life left; no further incentive to achieve success. He was not one to make friends quickly — nor quick to realize new things. He had fed his dearest hope with every beating of his loyal heart. And now he must put his dearest hope away from him. That meant that he must tear his heart from his body. Not for a month — nor a week — nor a year — but forever.

"Dorothy!" he said, smiling. "Little Dorothy! Little Dorothy!"

He could think of nothing but her name, then. What a name it was! It brought him, out of the dark that

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encompassed him, her face — shining, red lipped, gray eyed, pure as the leaf of a lily.

No one disturbed him. The lights burned brightly — but he might have been in the blackness of midnight for all he saw of his surroundings.

Yet it could not last. He roused from his strained position, pushed his chair back, got to his feet. Then he saw Dorothy's letter. He picked it up. His hands were like ice. He brought it to his lips — lips that were just as cold. Opening the drawer of the table he placed it carefully in the portfolio that held all his important papers. It must be answered — soon — he would answer it. But not yet. Oh, but it was so long since it had come to him. Dorothy would worry. Dorothy would think, perhaps, that she had hurt him . . . Afterward. . . . In a few minutes . . .

What next? He stared around him. A white, drawn face looked at him from the glass. The face of a stranger. It fascinated him. He drew close to it, stumbling across the room — gazing, gazing at the whiteness of it, the dull eyes, the tossed black hair.

"Poor chap!" he said aloud. "Poor chap! You're worse off than I. Who are you? What's the matter? Can a fellow — help —"

He turned to look. There was no one in the room. Back to the mirror he swung furiously. Ah! there it was still. His face! He realized, shuddering, that the face was his. A quiver of pain shot through him . . . again . . . The apathy had ended. The struggle had begun.

CHAPTER XII

TANGLED THREADS

KNOX, the detective, shrewd as he had proven himself on many an occasion, clever, too, as his superiors had acknowledged often, went home after his interview with Donald Mackenzie, fairly beaten. He told himself so, being nothing if not honest with himself.

Of course he had had his theory.

Briefly sketching it, that theory had been as follows:

Donald Mackenzie and George Wyndon were old acquaintances. He had not proven this yet, not even to his own satisfaction. But what did that matter? Donald Mackenzie had been in New York City a month before he called on William Wentworth, or let him or any one know his whereabouts. There was so much secrecy about his movements during this month that Knox argued guilt therefrom. What was his business during that time? No one knew. He himself had said, would say, nothing. To ask him outright would or might (Knox admitted the contingency, since the evidence was weak) put him on his guard. Wyndon was an old employee, a friend, one might call him, of President Wentworth's. He had everything under his control. With

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Donald's assistance he carried out the plan that Donald first conceived. Wyndon was sure of his employer's leniency — he knew the case would not be pushed too hard against him even if his crime were discovered. Donald, relying on his relationship — the detective called it that in his own mind, though well aware now of the fact that there were no ties of blood between them — felt himself almost absolutely safe. He it was who braced up Wyndon's accusing conscience, and, secure in his belief that no one could associate him with the crime, championed his weaker confederate fearlessly.

But why had a young man like Donald, just starting in life, saddled himself with such a burden? There must be a motive. Knox had supplied a motive by visiting the little town in Massachusetts, and that motive was Dorothy Wentworth.

Over and above all the facts that made for this hypothesis was the self-evident one that the bank robbery had been committed by novices. This was so plain to the professional man that it was the chief reason why he suspected Donald. Generally, when a crime of that sort or any sort has been perpetrated, the detective who comes to survey the ground can tell the hallmarks, as it were, of the criminal. Combining them, he can almost put his finger on the guilty man or men. In this instance all such signs were missing. And the losing of the cuff button was too bungling an error to be committed by any cracksmen worthy the name. Donald had claimed the cuff button, calmly and with effrontery. Knox wondered if

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he would have done so with such unconcern had he known the truth. For the button had been found, not by the detective, but by Byrd, the night watchman, upon the steps leading up to the bank door. The claim that it had been lost, presumably by the only man who could be connected with the crime, namely, Wyndon, under the electric light on the corner, was mere bravado — a feeler, as it were — for the detective did not wish to tell all he knew.

This was Knox's case — these were the lines along which he was working. True, the thing needed substantiation — bolstering up — it was weak in places. He would substantiate it, strengthen it. He would not admit the possibility of mistake. But now the discovery of the third button upset him sorely. It could hardly be possible that Donald Mackenzie suspected that he was watching him — and that he had arranged this *coup*. Yet it might have happened in just that way. What was easier than to have a button made — to hold it in readiness for such time as the detective called —

Trifles light as air may be as strong as Holy Writ to the suspicious as well as to the jealous. The next day Knox took the cuff button and went out on a still hunt of his own. He would find, working on the same theory, whether any of the leading jewelers recognized the stone — there was always a chance for a man to overreach himself. Before he left his room he wrote an advertisement, which set forth that there had been recently found, near Central Park Plaza, a sapphire cuff button. The owner could have it for suitable reward by applying

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to Mrs. Mary Towse, housekeeper at the Hotel Mercourt.

He inserted this advertisement to appear the following day, and then called to see Mrs. Mary Towse, his aunt. She was a bright little woman, with snappy brown eyes and gray hair, who had helped him out on various occasions, and who was very proud of the fact that her nephew was "in the service." As the advertisement would not appear until the next morning, it was not necessary that she should have the button until then.

He visited several jewelers — the leading ones of the city. None among them recognized his stone, though every one commented on its beauty, and on the daintiness of its setting. Knox was a well-known man and most of the jewelers were acquainted with him. In fact he had been of more or less service to them in the past, and they would have been glad to do anything they could to help him now. That was why, in speaking to the head clerk in the fifth store he went to, the man looked hesitatingly at the stone before he spoke.

"We employ, as you know, the best workmen in the States," he said. "But the design is so delicate that if we had anything like it to duplicate we'd send it to a little place we know of further down town. Odd old Germans, the members of the firm are, both of them, but their work can't be beaten. This is a professional secret, Knox," he went on. "I'm only telling you. It might even be called a breach of confidence — and if you were an outsider it would cost me my position."

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"You know me," said Knox. "Give me the address. I suppose other people do the same thing?"

"Other jewelers? Yes, of course."

He took the address and at once started on his way down town. He found the store without any trouble — dark, narrow, small — a counter running along one side, behind which, perched upon a high stool, sat a little, gray-headed, bespectacled man. They were not in the jewelry business, he told Knox, in answer to his query; they did work for larger houses, sometimes. Knox introduced himself as sent from the B. & A. Company, and showed his stone.

The little German peered at it through his big glasses. Then, taking up a magnifying glass, he examined it carefully before he spoke, giving Knox a suspicious glance.

"Where did you get this?" he asked. "Why do you bring it here?"

"To find out all I can about it," said Knox, at the same time showing his badge. The suspiciousness vanished from the man's face.

"So, then!" he said. "Well, I shall tell you."

He went to the safe at the back of the store and brought out a big ledger. It took him quite a while to find what he was hunting for. Then he held out his hand for the button, comparing it with the description.

"We did not make this button," he said. "It is the original. We made a duplicate from this one. See. Here it is marked: Sapphire, six carat, flat, sunk into old gold. H'm! Read further. There is the complete

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description. So. We made a button just like this, but not this —”

“But for whom?” interrupted Knox, impatiently.
“What firm?”

“No firm.”

“No firm?”

“No, sir. The gentleman himself was here —”

“Oh!” said Knox. A gleam of exultation shot across his face. “Have you the name?”

“The name? It is here. Mr. Felix Dunbar, Hotel Lincoln, New York City. To be called for.”

Knox gasped. Hotel Lincoln! Donald Mackenzie’s hotel! Felix Dunbar! the name Donald Mackenzie had given him.

“To be called for? You remember the button?”

“Very well, indeed. I remember the gentleman, also.”

“You do? Can you describe him to me?”

“Tall, finely built, pleasant faced, voice very musical —”

“Dark? Dark skin, hair, eyes —”

“Well,” the man hesitated, shrugging his shoulders, “I should not call him fair. This place is not so well lighted. He might have been dark. He wore a mustache. Inclined to be dark-reddish, as near as I can remember.”

“You would know him again if you saw him?” questioned Knox, eagerly.

“I would recognize his voice at once — a pleasant voice. I can remember that very well.”

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"Thank you," said Knox. "Could you not try to remember the color of his eyes? Try! How tall was he? About six feet?"

"Maybe. He was tall. Very tall. He stood just where you are — in that same spot. I am sure he would be head and shoulders over you. I am sure of that. But I can not remember his eyes. My sight is not good. I could not look at a customer through the magnifying glass."

"Of course you couldn't," said Knox. He stood irresolutely. The thread was leading him back again to Donald — too plainly for his liking. The veriest tyro could not leave behind him such a clue as this.

"Well, I am much obliged to you," he said at last. "Very much obliged. You think, at any rate, you could recognize him again? In case of trouble?"

"Surely," said the old man, cordially. Knox left then, much perturbed. Now for the advertisement. He doubted if any results would come from his advertisement. But he gritted his teeth — he had the one thing above all others necessary in his line — the doggedness of a bulldog. Felix Dunbar! Donald Mackenzie had used that name to him once before. The man existed, that was sure. And he gave the name of Donald's hotel as his stopping-place. Could it be that here he had grown careless? Perhaps through absent-mindedness — forgetting that eternal vigilance is the price the transgressor has to pay.

Knox smiled. No, he surely could never have been

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such a fool as that. He looked at his watch. Well, his day had not gone without fruit. He was a little further advanced. Supposing it were true, and that Mackenzie had had the button made, providing against the future? There was something about the duplicate button by which the old jeweler could recognize it as his work. If he could but bring the other two buttons now in Donald's possession and find out which one of them was the duplication.

The way to his rooms led past the Hotel Lincoln. As he neared it he saw a figure coming down the steps slowly. The figure turned in his direction. Knox nodded recognition.

Donald stared at him — then returned the salutation stiffly, and passed on. Knox turned to look after him. What had happened? He seemed ten years older; his face was drawn — haggard — as if he had received a great shock. His steps were slow, like those of a decrepit old man. Knox went into the hotel.

"Can you tell me if a man by the name of Felix Dunbar is stopping here, or has stopped here recently?"

"He is not stopping here now," answered the clerk. "Recently? Do you know how long ago?"

"Two months, I should judge," said Knox, calculating rapidly.

The clerk turned the pages of the registry book, running his fingers down the lines. Knox waited.

"No one of that name," he answered at last. Knox thanked him and went out. He had not expected that

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there would be. He wished then that he had followed Donald. Again he looked at his watch. His interview with the clerk had only taken ten minutes. He could walk past Wyndon's house. Perhaps the young man was going there. Something might have arisen that worried the chief conspirator. Knox could not rid himself of the habit he had fallen into of calling Donald that. In a few minutes he stood on the corner looking down the street at Wyndon's house. Donald was just turning up the steps. Knox smiled a little at his own sagacity.

Donald had passed a bitter night, wrestling with the agony that filled his soul. But he had fought it out to the very end; and though the conflict had left its marks upon him, his iron will had conquered. The future must be faced and the sooner he adjusted himself to new conditions the better for himself — the better for Dorothy. Where had been the joy of living there was now nothing but duty, and duty is so dark and colorless and attired in such somber garments! In the silence of the long night he had held out his young hands to this grim companion, forcing himself to the contemplation of him, shuddering at the thought of comradeship. By and by he realized that crosses worse than his had been borne by human nature and must be borne until that great day when the secret of all suffering is laid bare. Well-cultured, of religious principles, instilled not alone by the priests to whom his training had been committed, but by every action and every word of those who had so generously taken the place of his parents and been to him examples of true Catho-

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licity, there was no room for the despair that might have made, temporarily at least, a wreck of his life, and which would have driven a man less perfectly disciplined to deeds unbecoming his manhood. He thanked God from the bottom of his heart, then, that He gave him the grace to pray to Him, to ask His mercy. That now, when he besought strength in this troublous hour, the words he compelled his lips to utter became, ere long, a prayer that forced its way deep into his heart and brought him to his knees. He could not kiss the chastening rod yet — for he was young, ardent, impatient, but he asked that he might bear its stroke without rebellion.

The day had passed like some frightful nightmare. Toward morning he had fallen into a troubled sleep, from which he awoke unrefreshed. He had eaten, could eat, nothing. And then, realizing that the afternoon was drawing to a close, he thought of Wyndon, who was probably waiting for him, counting on his assistance, wondering what had kept him. He would not forget poor Wyndon. It was the first action of kindness he had performed or would try to perform, without Dorothy. It was the first step upon a road that he must tread alone.

He did not know that Knox was standing watching him. Who was Knox? Not any one that he had ever heard of just then. If he had returned his salutation it was not through recognition — rather an action outside his consciousness. When the door was opened he entered. Beatrice Wyndon admitted him. She stood waiting for him to speak.

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"Your father — he is at home?" asked Donald.
"Father? Oh, yes. It is Mr. Mackenzie —
have been waiting so long for you." She gave him
hand. He barely touched it. Her eyes were full
tears. They were standing alone in the hall and
turned her beautiful face upon him.

"I know all now — he told me, last night, after y
left. What can I say to you to thank you — to sho
how deeply —"

"Why?" asked Donald, in a level, passionless voice.
"I have done nothing. What I will do remains to be
proven."

"Ah, you do not realize! He is so different. No
just the same as he was — yet, but oh, so different
Willing to face the whole world. And it is through you."
She hesitated. "You have made me very happy
Mr. Mackenzie. Father could not conceal his feelings
from me — how could he, when we have been all in all
to each other so long? From that very night on I felt
the difference, and always, always, I attributed it to the
stranger. That is why I mentioned it yesterday — even
though I knew it would make him angry."

"And you see you were right," said Donald.

"Yes." She paused again. "It seems presumptuous
to burden you with our troubles. Perhaps you are busy
— in difficulties —"

"I?" asked Donald, faintly surprised. "Why do
you say that?"

"You will not be offended? Your voice is not the

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same as it was yesterday. There is something gone from it: there is no joy in it, no color. Perhaps you ought not to bother — But then there is no other way.”

“I am glad there is no other way,” said Donald. “Now, let us go to your father and consider the situation once more.”

“He is with my mother — I’ll call him,” said Beatrice Wyndon. “My mother is very delicate — you knew that, perhaps? Very. She never sees strangers. We are afraid of any excitement. She is so frail and shadowy. God is so good to us, Mr. Mackenzie. Often I wonder how we succeed in keeping her with us.”

“By force of love, perhaps,” said Donald, touched through his own great pain to hear this blind girl, the daughter of a dying woman, thanking God for His goodness.

“By force of love,” she echoed, smiling. “One can do anything when one’s love is strong enough.”

He winced. The words hurt him. His love had not been powerful enough to win him his heart’s beloved — one maiden out of the world of maidens. He followed her into the parlor. It was hard to believe the girl was blind, she moved about with such perfect freedom. Watching her seemed to take his attention from his own sorrow for the first time that day. And she, in the sweet and gentle tones it was delightful to listen to, began to talk to him while they waited for George Wyndon. Once she mentioned Dorothy, but he did not respond, and her wonderful instinct told her that, for this day

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at least, she knew not why, Dorothy was a subject to be avoided.

Donald left the Wyndons feeling better mentally; physically, conscious of a bad headache. He went on to William Wentworth's, wondering if he would be tormented here with the news of Dorothy's engagement. Fortunately he did not meet Aunt Joan, who had heard what news there was to tell from Randolph Carew himself, and one trial — the trial he dreaded — was spared him. A new butler took his card to William Wentworth's little room at the back of the library — one clad in conventional attire this time. Aunt Joan would not dare dress a man of ordinary appearance in the costume she had been so proud to see on her handsome Felix. Uncle William looked much brighter than the last time Donald had seen him.

"Hello, laddie!" he said, in cheerful accents. "What's up? Great guns, what a face! What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing," said Donald. "I suppose I must look seedy — I forgot that. May I have a cup of coffee?"

"May you — James, tell the cook to send some coffee here to us and a chicken sandwich. I'm hungry, too, Donald. Go ahead, James. Such a comfort to have a plain, sensible man waiting on you," went on Uncle William. "That last effort of Joan's used to upset my stomach. Lord! and Joan just raved about him! I suppose he had to earn his living some way, and that way was easy; he couldn't prevent Joan from having freakish notions. But since he's left —"

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"Left!" said Donald. "When did he leave?"

"When? He's gone five days now."

"Only five days! Did he tell you where?"

"To England, I believe. Some one left him a few dollars —"

"You don't know the some one's name, do you?"

"I? What do I know about it? Never could bear the fellow anyway. Hated the sight of him and his buttons and his powdered hair! And his name — Felix! Never could twist it about my tongue."

"I'm glad his name was just that and nothing else," said Donald. "Perhaps you'd like to hear who left him the money?"

"I don't care — if you insist. What are you driving at?"

"He's off for parts unknown with your two hundred thousand, Uncle William!"

The old man stared at Donald, and his face got very red.

"What's the joke?" he asked then, derisively.

"It's on you if there's any," said Donald, grimly.

James entered with a tray. He put it on the table, poured the coffee, and handed the cups to both men. William Wentworth nodded impatiently and the servant went out. Donald, with an eagerness new to him, sipped at the strong, hot beverage, watching Uncle William's face meanwhile. He kept staring at Donald, biting savagely at the sandwich. Donald laughed then; he couldn't help it. The old man looked so funny, with his

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red, angry face, the cup of coffee in one hand, the sandwich in the other, at which he shot out his underjaw as if he were annihilating a whole regiment of chickens. When Donald laughed his brows came together, frowning.

"Another cock-and-bull story!" he cried out.

"Wait," said Donald. He felt better even now. He drained the cup, but shoved the plate away from him. He did not care for anything to eat. "I want to tell you all about it, Uncle William. But you've got to go back a bit and remember things. Was there any mention made, at any time, in this house, of the consignment which reached your bank that afternoon — *the* afternoon? I don't remember the date. You know what I mean. Think now."

William Wentworth, still frowning, bent his eyes to the carpet.

"Wyndon was here two days before," he said, thoughtfully. "Let me see. Yes. We talked it over right in this room —"

"With Aunt Joan's haughty servant as a listener at the keyhole," said Donald. "I surmised as much."

He went over the whole thing then — from the beginning, and William Wentworth listened, incredulously. Then Donald's earnestness impressed him. Donald's picture of Wyndon's misery brought the tears to his eyes, though for worlds he would not have Donald see them. The quiet conviction in the young man's tones stirred him to belief. And when he finished, Uncle William brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

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"By Jove!" he said. "By Jove!"

Donald smiled, well pleased. Uncle William, reaching over, put his hand on his knee.

"Thank God, boy, that Wyndon is an innocent man," he said. "Doubt of him was worse than losing the money."

The action, the words, were so like what John Wentworth's would have been under similar circumstances that Donald could scarcely speak. A lump rose in his throat.

"You believe —"

"Implicitly. Come, lad, you and I have to sift this to the bottom before we drop it. There's work for us to do."

"You'll tell Knox, of course?"

"Is it necessary?"

"Oh, tell him, Uncle William. He'll know how to proceed better than we will. Besides, it's his concern now."

"I'll send for him to-morrow, then. He'll want to see Wyndon."

"Wyndon hates him. Perhaps Miss Beatrice would consent to tell him what she knows — as she told me. I'll see her and ask. But Wyndon feels very bitterly toward Knox."

"Well, he shan't see him unless he wants to," said Uncle William, impulsively. "Wyndon has suffered enough."

"Indeed he has suffered enough," echoed Donald.

CHAPTER XIII

DOROTHY'S MISSION

EVERY woman possesses a certain amount of adaptability — some in a less, some in a greater degree. Professor Wentworth's daughter took rank in the latter category. Her education, her beauty, her manner — which was nothing if not sincere, and yet altogether charming — gave her a certain footing even before she came to join the circle in which her husband moved. For, at the time appointed, Dorothy Wentworth became Mrs. Randolph Carew.

The Professor had said "at least a year," and the mother had echoed him. No one was more reluctant than Dorothy herself, who, scarcely wooed, found herself to be wedded. Therefore it showed of what masterful stuff her husband was made, when, on May the eleventh, he said her new home was even then in preparation and that at the end of June she must come to him. As usual, the Professor gave in first. If he did not care as much for Randolph Carew as he did for Donald, who was almost his own child, he esteemed him even on so short acquaintance and he felt that this regard would grow into something deeper as time progressed. Not by a single word, save, perhaps, in solitude *à deux*, did the young man

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protest his affection for the girl he sought to win — but the Professor understood. Only love — silent, intense love — could prompt the devotion that seemed to linger about her and around her. The mother, too, ever on the watch for anything that might offend, yielded completely to the magnetic charm of the man, and acknowledged that her daughter would have everything that a loving husband could bestow.

They were indeed simple folk — kindly and honest — knowing little of and caring less for the great world in which Randolph Carew moved, and in which, hereafter, their Dorothy must play her part. This worried them. It worried her, too, but she hid that worry from the sight of every one, even Randolph Carew himself. She had had a glimpse into that gilded sphere — for a brief space her feet had trodden its shining paths and her ears had listened to the voices of its inhabitants. She had no longing to return to it — no liking for it. She preferred the honest hearts about her. She preferred unkind truths to unkind flattery. She saw her lover come into their life and fall into their ways of thinking — naturally, unaffectedly. She did not hope that such a condition of things might last. She knew that had she asked him then he would have cast aside his other friends as useless, worn-out things. But the temptation never came to her. For what guarantee had she that such a state of mind would continue? No. She would bend to him at first that he might rise to her.

For Dorothy's sake Randolph Carew would have

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made himself all things to any kind of men. But in her home there was nothing to condemn — all to emulate. If primitive in his ideas, the Professor was a gentleman — a man of culture — his culture unalloyed by contact with the baser metal of mankind. And, as the day of his wedding with Dorothy approached, both parents acknowledged that since the parting had to be, it was better that it came as soon as possible. The Professor no longer locked himself up days at a time studying his precious beetles, but came out, restlessly, seeking the daughter he was soon to lose. Dorothy, too, clung passionately to the father who had never failed her. They took long rides together — she on the mare Donald had bought her, he on Donald's own black Tartan. Often during these long journeys into the beautiful country about them they never exchanged a word. Or again, easily and with the fearlessness of a frank child, Dorothy spread out before her father's vision a picture of what she meant to make her future life. She had gone to see Father Preston as soon as she could after promising herself to Randolph Carew. This priest, her father's dearest friend, was much to Dorothy. To him she had brought every trouble of her childhood — every perplexity of her older days — every problem she ever had to face. To him she came now for advice and comfort, setting out on the long journey of life that was never to end until God ended it.

“So you are going away from us, little Dorothy?” he said, sadly enough, when she came into the vestry

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after Mass one beautiful May day. "How did it happen?"

"I don't know, Father," she answered, blushing hotly. "It was to be, I suppose. And now I have come to you to talk very seriously about it — and everything — if you will listen to me."

"If I will listen! Dorothy, have I ever refused to listen?"

"No," she answered.

The gravity of his face made her hesitate. A chill crept over her.

"He is not a Catholic, Father Preston."

"I know it, daughter. Your father told me. I am sorry."

"I am, too — very, very sorry. But father also told you — he told you he was willing to become a Catholic if —"

"Yes. We couldn't consider that a moment, Dorothy."

"I know." She bent her bright head. "I know. I love him dearly — so very dearly. But the future frightens me."

"That is well," said Father Preston. "It is well to put your faith in God, and work out your salvation in fear and trembling."

"His salvation, too, Father," she murmured. "His salvation, too."

"His salvation? God grant — God in heaven grant it! You really love him, Dorothy, child?"

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"Yes, Father."

"Too well to give him up?"

"I love him," answered Dorothy, in a low voice, and dropping the lids over her gray eyes, "so well that I could give him up if it were for his happiness." A shade of color tinged her face. "There is nothing I could not, would not, do for him. There is nowhere I would not follow him — into poverty and want, into trouble and woe. There is nothing I would not suffer with him — hunger and need. But Father, Father, only —"

She caught her breath sharply.

"Only with the hope of saving his immortal soul," she whispered. "Only with the hope that in the end he may be one with me. Oh, listen." She put her hand upon his arm, and now her eyes were wide open, shining, glowing, with the exaltation that he knew crept into them when Dorothy was laboring under strong excitement. "I have been — out there. Father, I hate it! I hate the idleness of it. I hate the glitter. I hate the hollow pleasure, the excitement, the hunger of it all. I hate it, hate it, with all the strength of which my soul is capable. Every moment of the day I shall long for Wentworth — where home is, where peace is, where purity is in the air I breathe —"

"Dorothy —" began the priest.

"Let me finish, Father. I can not tell them this — those whom I love — my father and my mother, who love me. They would grieve and worry. Let them think I like the life — until I come back. Come back

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I shall, since God is in heaven and upholds the universe. Come back I shall, while His merciful heart can listen to the prayer of a creature —”

The priest looked at her with tender eyes.

“Think of me,” she went on passionately. “In the midst of that life — in the midst of it. Lacking my mother’s love, my father’s counsel. With men around me to whom womanly purity is a name, with women who will sneer at my old-fashioned, uncompromising way of regarding evil, and who will laugh because I refuse to seek for the mote in my neighbor’s eye, conscious of the beam that is in my own. But there are some good among them — and those good ones I shall find and cling to. Those good ones shall make my world.” Her head was lifted high, her eyes were glowing. “I shall dress as fashion dictates, and I shall lead — that others may follow. I have done it, I can still do it. Why? For the sake of one man’s soul! For the sake of what I may be to him! For the sake of that glorious moment in the end, when he will turn to me and say, ‘My wife, show me. Show me where you get your strength, your purpose. Show me, that you and I may know each other truly.’ Father, this is my mission. In the name of God, in the name of our holy religion, bless me now, and send me forth upon it.”

The tears were in his eyes, were streaming down his face, for she had clasped his hand in both of hers and bent her cheek against it. He raised the other hand and placed it on her head reverently. He had known her since she

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was a little, fragile child, when the spirituality of her baby face had seemed to destine her for an early grave. As a girl he had thought her one of God's rarest types of womanhood. He had had his dreams, too, for her — dreams that the great Creator would call her to the higher life.

The vision she opened before him now overwhelmed him, carried him out of himself. He saw this child — the child he loved — the central figure of a little group, attracting others by her nobility — attracting them, alluring them, sanctifying them. The greed for souls sprang up with greater force in his gentle heart — the greed for souls that is part of every good priest's heritage. His face glowed even as her own.

"God bless you," he said, in a broken voice. "Oh, God bless you, Dorothy Wentworth. Girl, girl, 'tis a weary road, and the thorns will prick these tender fingers that have gathered nothing but rosebuds along the ways of life. Tears come and are dried, and are easily forgotten. But not the tears that you will have to shed. God alone can dry them. Let the unbelieving husband be sanctified by the believing wife. Often and often has that been done, my child. But what a perilous mission —"

"You have blessed me," she said, in a voice that spoke of tears. "My heart is strong for any fate now, Father Preston, since you have blessed me."

* * * * *

So they were married in the vestry of the little church where Dorothy had been baptized, at the rail of

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whose high altar she had been given her first holy communion and been confirmed. Remembering that conversation, Father Preston held his priestly hands above their bent heads a long time. Even Randolph Carew was deeply touched — but only Dorothy knew that it was because of her great mission that the priest clasped her fingers so lovingly before they parted, looking into her face with eyes that seemed to give her strength for that unknown future she was facing from this hour.

With high heart and undashed hopes she entered upon it. Under Aunt Joan she had had a taste of the life she was now to know in all its completeness. Her beauty unspoiled by any aiming at effect, her charming manners, were as unlike the artificiality that surrounded her as night from day. Her sensitive soul shrank from the hollow merriment — the eternal chase after the god Pleasure. She was startled, annoyed, ashamed, too, at the shamelessness of some of her sisters. Her spotlessness of thought and mind had nothing in common with the daily life of those who sought to bring her into their circle for what prestige the most beautiful young matron of the day might add to it.

She had a position to maintain, Randolph Carew reminded her — a little surprised at the stand she was taking. Fearless and frank, obstinate to a marked degree, a few there were who loved her, but many hated even while they envied her. She refused to acquiesce politely in the shams that presented themselves for her approval. And her husband told her, laughingly, that

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there was such a word as ostracism. She turned and looked at him with the gray eyes that had lighted the flame of Donald Mackenzie's highest hopes, that had made Father Preston listen to her words with beating heart. And as she bent them upon her husband, he took her hands, kissing them suddenly to hide the rush of feeling that tempted him to throw himself at her feet when her soul revealed itself thus.

"Ostracism!" she repeated proudly — and Dorothy could surprise him with her haughtiness at times. "There is such a word, Randolph, indeed there is. But I have taken the initiative in pronouncing it."

Randolph said nothing more. He could not. By and by, to his astonishment, he realized that she had spoken the truth — that Mrs. Randolph Carew was a power. The element surrounding her was refined, cultured, honest. To be recognized by Mrs. Carew meant entrance into a select circle. She never lost sight of the fact that she was a woman whom men must honor for the sake of her sex — that as she held herself, so would the men she knew hold all women; that a good woman may, as the poet sings, on her sweet self set her own price; and that as often as a man thought with reverence of any woman, so much the higher did he advance on the ladder that leads to pure nobility of soul. This was her simple creed, and, unabashed, she voiced it. And other women followed her gladly, loving her for the high value she taught them to place upon themselves.

How Dorothy's heart exulted! She bound her friends

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to her with hooks of steel. She willed that they should love her, since mankind is not led by fear, but love. She met whomsoever she would — not those who wished to meet her — and when they left her, they, who had been strangers, bore the seeds of affection for her within their breasts. To her husband she was all in all. His wife, tender and true; his comrade, gentle, unobtrusive, soft of voice and footstep; his sweetheart, coquetting with him as she had not done in the brief days of their courtship; his friend, with warning finger and counseling words; his monitress, letting him look the while into the depths of her nature, where were stored the truths she knew and held to, a granary of wisdom; his helpmate, always.

Often she felt that something hid his soul from her. Often he looked into her true eyes, and turned away from her, sighing. At such times she would laugh at him, and jest with him, until he, too, laughed, forgetting.

For she loved him. And she must save him. She prayed that God would give them some privation, some sorrow to bear together: would take away some of this wealth by which they were surrounded; take it away; strip them of all but honor; leave them poor, so that, like homeless wanderers, they might steal forth into the night, hand in hand, with the stars looking down upon them, and God's blessing all about them.

For only in poverty, she felt, could she accomplish her mission. She was waiting, willing, praying. Was he not hers? And must she not save his soul?

CHAPTER XIV

HOW IT HAPPENED

DONALD had not been to see Dorothy married. He had sent her a wedding gift, and a note, very brief, indeed almost curt, wishing her all possible happiness. He could scarcely bring himself to do that much, for his heart was sore, the wound deep. Nor had he been to Wentworth since, although he and the Professor corresponded as of old — even more frequently. John Wentworth understood his boy. He knew that Time, the great healer, and silence, Time's greatest helpmate, would cure the pain. And until that hour came — when he himself could talk of it, freely and without restraint — his foster father, too, could be silent.

Work descended on the young architect like a veritable avalanche. He found himself literally buried in it. For this he had, as we know, William Wentworth to thank primarily — and then his own untiring industry. But through it all he never forgot the Wyndons. The little house between the two busy avenues was his oasis in the desert. George Wyndon had resumed his old place in the bank. Matters progressed much as usual. Knox was looking for Felix Dunbar quietly, unobtrusively,

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with a wariness, a pertinacity, a doggedness, worthy of a better cause. The sapphire button remained in his possession unclaimed, and the case had become, with him, almost a religion. He lost sight of the great reward; he lost sight of the reputation he would make; he lost sight of everything but the fact that one man had baffled him. To him this man was Donald Mackenzie. He hated him. Every energy was bent to compass his destruction. When William Wentworth sent for him, and told him who Felix Dunbar was, he laughed.

"Your butler? And he is in England? The Felix Dunbar we are searching for is in New York City. I know the name and I know the man. Because I do not say much does not argue that I am doing nothing. Rest assured that before long the mystery will be made as plain as day."

So William Wentworth let him alone. The loss of the money no longer pinched him, for five months had elapsed since Knox had said this, and he had almost made good his great loss. Still there was no news, so that if by any chance allusion was made to the acumen of detectives as a class, the old gentleman's lip would curl. He felt more confident, anyhow, since time locks had been placed on all the vaults. That was better. And George Wyndon was back again, looking happy once more. That was better still.

And indeed George Wyndon's looks did not belie his feelings. He was much happier, though not like what he had been before that troublous time. There would be no

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complete happiness for him until the matter was settled. Donald felt that this peace of mind was due to his efforts. Beatrice Wyndon, gentle and lovable, with her keen instincts, her sensitiveness, her sympathy, had done much, in her own way, for the younger man. Yet it had not been until this past few weeks that he had ventured to speak of Dorothy again. He found that it was not necessary — that she understood. She had understood for months, she told him.

If something had gone out of his life, it had not gone forever. It would come back again. He must face the future boldly — the avoiding of it would not cure him.

Why not call upon Dorothy? He must see her — see how happy she was; acknowledge to himself that she was happy as he could have ever hoped to make her. Surely that was no way to live his life — when Dorothy loved him, and sorrowed because he would not be friends with her — he who had been her brother and friend so long. There were girls as sweet as Dorothy in the world. Maybe he did not think so yet. Afterwards he would. Did he think it was fair to her to cloud her happiness by avoiding her?

Donald, listening, knew that Beatrice Wyndon was but repeating the very words that Dorothy herself had uttered in order that he might be told them. He knew they were fast friends. He knew, though he had never asked, that Dolly visited Beatrice regularly. Well, the worst was over. He could look with calmness on the fact that Dorothy Wentworth was never to take part in his

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life. After all, she was right. Why should he not go to see her — meet her face to face, and have it over?

He said nothing of this to Beatrice Wyndon, but changed the subject with an abruptness that told the girl much of how her words were affecting him. He went home shortly afterward. That night and the following day he thought it over. When evening came he decided to call on the Carews. That it would be an embarrassing moment for both, he had no doubt. But it would pass.

* * * * *

There was a dim light in the parlor. Whistling cheerily, Randolph Carew entered it, turning up every gas jet, so that the place was flooded with the brilliant glow. He had been banished from his wife's room, with the admonition to wait for her downstairs, and give her at least five minutes' time to herself — she could never get ready if he would not. So, smiling, he had taken himself away, and, still smiling in contented fashion, he threw his coat across one chair, and drawing another under the chandelier, sat waiting. He knew she would not be long — not longer than she could help, he amended in an amused way — for that to-night's occasion happened to be a great one, he knew, and his beautiful wife needed a few extra moments. After all, she could have as many moments as she liked. There would be no one among them like her — the lily maid, Dorothy. He could hear the buzz as she entered the room. He could see the heads turning — the glances of the men — the men who

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had known him many years, and who envied him above all other men.

"She is wonderful," he said, aloud. "Thank God she belongs to me."

Thank God! Leaning his elbows on the arms of his chair, he brought his fingers together, reflecting. Thank God! he had said. Yes, he believed there was a God — now. If he could but believe like Dorothy. He would give much to believe like her.

The smile faded. Three months married — only three months! Thank God again that the time was so short — he would have so many more months of life with her. Of years. Long, long years. He had not known that love could exalt, ennoble — even such as he. For when she was in a room his eyes sought her, drinking refreshment from her presence, as a tired traveler quenches his thirst in the clear waters of a mountain stream. If she was all beautiful, she was all holy, too — He was glad the Catholic marriage vow made wedlock so binding. She would belong to him — forever — forever — forever —

The thought was an exultant one. He had not been a good man in the past, he told himself. He had put the past behind him, away from him. With Dorothy he started on a new career. His life began the day he married her.

He had made light of many things three months ago; he had said many things did not matter — little strainings of the moral code; the lips that lied unblushingly;

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daring little sins against the law that makes for order. After all, he had said then, was not every man a law unto himself? What did such trifles matter?

But now he would not say so.

There was no mawkishness in his wife's character; he had never heard a word about religion from her lips. But he had seen her, unseen himself, at her devotions. He never intruded upon her. But he wondered what gave the light to her face; he wondered if it were the soul within that transfigured it, making it to glow so rapturously, as at the seeing of sights not granted to mortals. He did not ask her. He dared not.

And into her pure life he came, humbled and abashed, casting all his errors into the darkness from which he rose, a new man, a new soul, from that past of his, because of his great love.

The doorbell rang, a loud, annoying peal. It broke in rudely upon his tender thoughts. He would have given it no further consideration had not the sound of voices disturbed him. The servant was parleying, the visitor insistent.

"There is no need, I tell you," said a firm voice. "I am known to Mrs. Carew very well — very well, indeed. I do not wish to give my name."

"What is it?" called Randolph Carew, lazily, from the depths of his armchair. "Show the gentleman in, Simmons."

Without further ado, the portières were pulled aside. A young man, tall, dark, distinguished-looking, in full

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dress, entered the room. Randolph Carew did not rise. He turned his head in the languid manner habitual to him — only an affectation after all, and one which tided him over some embarrassing moments.

Donald Mackenzie and Dorothy's husband were face to face at last.

"Come right in," said Randolph Carew, pleasantly. "Mrs. Carew is going out this evening, but I dare say she can give you a few moments." He looked up at his visitor once more. The visitor stood staring at him, blinking a little uncertainly. The light, thought Randolph Carew.

"I wish to see Mrs. Carew," said Donald.

"Yes — I heard you say so." The husband laughed under his breath. "I, also. I am waiting for Mrs. Carew."

The pleasantry was lost on Donald. He came forward slowly, standing before the other man, his steady gaze fixed upon the handsome, aristocratic face. It was an odd look. Randolph Carew felt that. A sudden fear struck him that perhaps this visitor was a crank — insane, maybe — a possible source of danger to Dorothy. The thought made him nervous. He sat up straighter, and returned the stare with interest.

"Won't you sit down?" he said, courteously. "Mrs. Carew can not be many minutes now. But I do not think she will care to see you, or any one, to-night. Tell me what you wish to say to her. I shall gladly give her the message."

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"You?" said Donald Mackenzie, and the smile that curved his lips was not a pleasant one. "The less you have to say to her the better for her, I think. What have *you* to do with Dorothy Carew?"

"I?" Randolph laughed, but anger was stirring within him at this free use of her dear name. "Very little, indeed. I am only Mrs. Carew's husband."

Had he struck Donald in the face the young man could not have been incited to greater rage. His body seemed to lunge forward, his hands clenched.

"*You!* Liar!"

It was an ugly word. The smile never left Carew's lips. He leaned over and touched the bell.

"Unfortunately, Sir Stranger, I do not lie. You will leave this house at once or I shall have you handed over to the police."

"You!" said Donald, laughing mirthlessly. "The husband of Dorothy Wentworth! I know too much about you to believe that, MR. FELIX DUNBAR!"

Simmons appeared at the door; behind him, a stalwart footman. Simmons had not liked the stranger's appearance — had resented his curtness. He was glad of the summons now.

"You rang, Mr. Carew?"

"Yes," said the master, in an uncertain voice. Donald did not stir. "It was — a mistake. I will ring again if I need you."

The butler went out, bowing. There was silence. Randolph Carew was ghastly, his lips blue. Suddenly

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Donald Mackenzie began to shake as if he had a chill — his face would not be whiter in its grave. He held the back of the chair, trying to support his weight upon it, trying also to recover his mental balance. The moments passed. Carew stared at him in a fascinated way. Finally, he put up his hand and brushed the hair — damp with cold perspiration — from his forehead.

“Won’t you sit down?” he said coolly. “Tell me who you are, at any rate, and what you are trying to get at.”

A change had come over the debonair gentleman. There was a silkiness to the pleasant voice, a tightening of the nostrils, a glint of the eyes.

“I beg of you to sit down,” said Randolph Carew. The sound of his own voice gave him courage. He pointed to the chair that Donald still held. “I have not many minutes to give you — my wife —” He paused, his face twitching a little. “You said you wanted to see Mrs. Carew? What for?”

The muscles in his throat contracted. Donald Mackenzie, because his limbs refused to support his weight, groped for the chair then, and fell into it. But not once did his eyes leave Carew’s face.

“Her husband!” he muttered. “Great God!”

He clasped his forehead, still staring.

“I can not understand,” he said, and the breath caught in his throat like a sob. “I can not understand!”

Randolph Carew was silent.

“Tell me,” said Donald, “tell me. What is it? I am mistaken? Man, you shall be free from me forever —

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to go your way where you will — if you will tell me that it is not true. You are not Randolph Carew?"

Carew bowed his head.

"Is it true?" asked Donald, miserably. "You are Randolph Carew here. And you are Felix Dunbar — or were —"

He covered his face with his hands. The other had regained his composure. He shrugged his shoulders.

"May I ask who you are?" he said coldly. "You have the advantage of me."

"My name is Donald Mackenzie."

"Donald Mackenzie!" Randolph Carew tapped lightly on the arm of his chair. "I have heard the name before. I am happy to make your acquaintance."

Donald did not speak.

"Your actions are rather strange — let us say eccentric," went on Carew, smiling. "I have no doubt, though, that Dorothy will be glad to see you — very glad." He bent forward, bringing all the power of which he was capable to bear on the man opposite, his eyes narrowing to sharp little points that glowed like blue steel. But Donald threw back his head bitterly.

"None of that with me," he said, "Mr. — Carew. I am not George Wyndon."

There was the rustle of a silken gown upon the stairs just then, the tap of a slipper. Dorothy's voice reached them. Donald Mackenzie sprang to his feet.

"Hurry, Ethel, there's a dear," she called. "I'll wait for you in the parlor."

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"Hide me," said Donald, hoarsely. "Hide me — put me somewhere — anywhere. Get me out of this. She must not see me — *must* not, for her sake, as well as yours."

With a rapid movement Randolph Carew drew him quickly to the other end of the room. Long Oriental draperies almost hid the corner, and he pulled the edge of the curtain completely over him. Not a moment too soon. His wife was standing in the doorway looking at him.

"Oh, there you are!" she called out, merrily. "What are you poking at my Turkish corner for? You know you detest it. Come away, and look at me."

She stood under the light, holding out her arms, a smile on her lips. A fair enough sight, truly, for any man to see. Her face was lifted to meet her husband's eyes, and Donald, gazing, knew that Dolly was a happy woman. Only perfect happiness could bring that serenity to any woman's features.

"Do you like me, Randolph?" she asked, laughing. "Don't tell me you are speechless to-night — I have heard that so often from you. Is it the gown, dear?"

"No, it's just you," he made answer. "Just you, Dorothy."

"Randolph!"

She moved nearer to him, looking at him with eyes grown suddenly anxious.

"Why, how white you are! How queer! Randolph! No, no," as he put his arms out to clasp them about her,

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"what is it? You have never looked like this before. Has anything happened to you, husband?"

"Happened?" He threw his handsome head back, laughing. "Something dreadful, sweetheart. You have left me too long alone — I grew frightened at the thought that it might be forever."

"No, no!" She clung to his arm, beseechingly. "That is subterfuge. Something *has* happened to you! And you will not tell me! Do you think I can not read your face?" she went on, in a strained voice. "It is something evil, something that stands now, this moment, between you and me. It is my right to know it —"

"Ridiculous little woman!" he answered, lightly. "What could come between us when we love each other?"

"Nothing;" she gave herself to his embrace then and lifted shining eyes. But her lips were white. "Nothing."

"Poverty, perhaps?"

She laughed, and her arms clasped him.

"Sickness?"

She shuddered.

"Mine, I hope," she said, "so that God spares you every ill."

"Disgrace?"

"Disgrace?" She hesitated. "My husband — and disgrace?"

"But supposing it possible?"

"It could not be."

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"Supposing it possible, Dorothy?"

"Then it would be mine too, Randolph."

"Yours?" He unclasped her arms, and held her away from him — his face a thing evil to contemplate, his lips set in a white line. "Do you think you can make me believe that? Are you different from the rest of women? Poverty, disgrace, forsooth! They are not for such as you, Dorothy. This beautiful woman I call my wife is mine until either touches me. After that she goes her way, and leaves me to find mine alone! Poverty, disgrace, for a woman who holds a court that a queen might envy? Faugh!"

It was the talk of his class — the cynical, sneering talk she abhorred. Never since she knew him had she heard such words from his lips. Her head drooped. The light died out of her eyes. Her hands fell to her sides. She did not look at him, nor try to approach him.

"And yet such things befall," he went on, bitterly. "Well, let them come —"

"And if they come —" she whispered.

"Why, I am here to meet them." He laughed recklessly. "There is a way out — for me."

He was too excited to notice the deathly pallor of her face. His thoughts were bitter ones — for once Dorothy had no place in them. "Always a way out," he repeated again, walking up and down the room. He had forgotten the passing of time — he had forgotten everything but the passionate anger against fate that held him captive. She did not move, nor did her eyes follow him.

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But Donald was looking at her, and could have groaned aloud. Was her husband blind that he could not see that she was suffering? At last her silence attracted Carew's attention. He turned to her, moving nearer to her, as if he could not stay away. He put his hand under her chin, and turned her face so that the light fell full upon it. He saw the tears that stood upon her lashes. The sight of them brought him to himself.

"Why, what have I done?" he cried, trying to speak naturally. "What is the matter, little woman?"

"Nothing," she answered. She could hardly speak for the lump in her throat. "Nothing — or everything."

"God!" said Randolph Carew, standing over her, his eyes flaring, his arms straight and tense, his fingers clenched. "If there be a God —"

Dorothy covered her face with a little cry.

"If there be a God, and He is, as you say, merciful as well as just, let Him forget His justice now, and be merciful. Let Him prove it. Not for my sake, but for yours."

"Oh!" she gasped, "are you mad, Randolph? Are you mad? What is it? Tell me — tell me, now. I can bear anything." She threw herself upon his breast and clung to him, her bosom heaving. "Tell me what it is — but do not shut me out of any sorrow you have to bear. Randolph, Randolph, can't you see — can't you realize that you are killing me?"

No, he could not. Randolph Carew could not know what these last few moments had been to the woman who

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was his wife. But Donald covered his eyes, his heart aching. Donald knew.

"Well, then," said the husband, kissing her, "I have been — I am in a little trouble, dear. Call it money trouble if you will," with a half smile at his own jest. "And I am worried."

"Money! Trouble about money! And you made me suffer like this because of money?" She drew away from him — a sudden coldness on her face. "For such a paltry thing you have almost broken my heart! What has money to do with you or with me? And you worried about it — for *my* sake?"

The disdain on her face was superb. It shamed him — but for the life of him he could not take his fascinated eyes away. Without another word she picked up her gloves and fan from the table where she had laid them on her entrance into the room and walked to the door. Here she paused and turned to him once more.

"Are you ready to go now?" she asked icily. "Or would you rather we stayed home to-night? After what has happened, I should prefer the latter."

"Would you really be willing to stay home, Dorothy?"

"I am awaiting your decision in the matter. The choice is yours."

"Then I choose you to go."

"Very well." Without a trace of color in her face she left the room. Recklessly — careless whether she returned or not — Randolph Carew swung around to where Donald sat in shadow.

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"Come out, Mr. Mackenzie," he said, in a voice that quivered with passion. "Come out and see Mrs. Carew. She may like to hear the tale you have to tell. Come. Let me call her. She will listen —"

"Hush!" said Donald Mackenzie. "Good God, are you insane? Hush!"

"Why not wait? Her charming cousin, too, will come in in a few moments! What a delectable story! I should like to hear it as you would tell it. Enter the villain —"

"You are safe from me," said Donald, in a weary voice. "I wish you were as safe from others. Man, man, don't you ever ask that God you seemed to mock to-night to make you worthy? Don't you ever ask yourself what you are or who, that you have been given a soul like hers, a heart like hers, with its priceless love? Her husband! How little you know her!"

Randolph Carew's face worked.

"She has been my heaven," he said. "My religion. But this hell in my breast has kept us far apart."

"A man whose feet have once trodden evil ways —"

"May be reclaimed."

"Whose hands have touched what was not his —"

"May clean them. Do not say he can not."

"Whose heart has known wickedness —"

"May purge it — granted time, with — her."

"I believe you. Good night."

"Good night."

CHAPTER XV

ON WHOM THE BLOW FELL

EVEN as they had planned doing, Dorothy Carew and her charming cousin, Ethel Lorimer, went to Mrs. Lee's dance. That lady, one of Dorothy's few intimates, was unfeignedly glad to see her. She had begun to fear a disappointment, for it had grown rather late, and Dorothy had promised to arrive early. The young wife needed every spark of her self-control to-night, and that she acted in her usual manner showed that she had learned thoroughly the lesson of her husband's world. Perhaps, had one cared to look, he might have observed a little tremor to the smiling lips, a strained shadow under the deep gray eyes, an artificial ring to the brilliant tones. But she bore herself right bravely; not even Ethel, who loved her, knew that a keen sorrow was stirring at her heart. For the proud, outspoken daughter of John Wentworth had come to know many things this past three months — a great many more than she would ever have known had she married Donald Mackenzie, and settled into the innocent, primitive existence of her native village.

She entered upon her wedded life with more serious purpose than do most girls of twenty, firmly believing that

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Randolph Carew and she had been drawn together by the hand of God. Her father, if he spoiled her, according to Claudia Wentworth, had opened her eyes to the broad contemplation of life's duties which many men possess, and but few women. He had taught her that there was evil in the world. Evil was a thing of necessity, that human nature might verify God's trust, and avoid evil. He taught her not alone to shun it, but its appearances. He taught her charity, since who can read the impulse of another's deeds? More than this, in addition to this, she loved her husband as her heart told her a husband should be loved. Not for his position nor for his wealth, nor for the luxuries with which he surrounded her, but for himself alone. She felt that he and she stood apart; that this sparkling world, which so desired her to dance to its merry music, was but the anteroom of a completer joy. The joy that would be hers, when, as she had said so bravely to Father Preston, her husband would ask her, of his own free will, to show him the light that led beyond.

Lately she had been gladdened by the fact that for three Sundays he had accompanied her to High Mass. What this meant to her, only she knew. It was a wonderful thing — almost a foretaste of that perfect moment that was coming — when he knelt beside her in the pew, listening with keen attention to every word the priest uttered. For she met, on every hand, not irreligion, but the lack of all religion. She heard girls, young, sweet, beautiful, dally with the most sacred subjects, and pass

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flippant remarks concerning that All-Wise Being of whose immensity and whose power they had not the faintest conception. Young women, mothers of children, laughed airily at the mention of the word duty, and shunned it just as airily. Women of mature years lifted their shoulders at thought of anything serious to be accomplished in life. Old women, on the brink of the grave, seemed to imagine that what remnant of days was left them could best be filled up by caustic phrases — mis-called witty — on the follies of youth, the frailty of femininity, the foibles of the masculine sex.

But not all were of this sort, and to the exceptions Dorothy turned, yearning. They responded to her mood, without knowing the real, the spiritual hunger that prompted her high views. This was her probation. . . . Surely, in a little while . . . She was enduring all, that he might see in the end. That after it was over he would come — rise to her, and look with eyes of faith, pityingly, even as she did, on the world of unrest and infidelity below them.

He had grown used to her — accepting her religion as part of her. He knew that every fiber of her soul was entwined about that perfect faith of hers. Again and again he had left her presence ashamed of his own pettiness, afraid, trembling at the shadow of a past that had never troubled him till now. And after a while, in his secret heart, he made a compact with Dorothy's unseen God. Let Him keep that past away, and he would prove himself worthy of her. This he said, poor simple-

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ton, not understanding. Forgetting that the sins of a man often fall the heaviest on those who are infinitely dearer to him than himself.

And this evening, on which began the tragedy of their lives, Dorothy had turned to him as always, joyous, smiling, hopeful, with love in her face and laughter on her lips. Anticipation of the great day that was coming for her made her question her own soul always: "It will be now, perhaps? To-night? In a little while? And am I ready? Dear God, make me ready. Put the right words into my mouth, the right spirit into my heart, that when he questions I may answer justly." His tragic demeanor, his distraught appearance, the cutting sentences in which he seemed to put her outside his life, had wounded her to the quick. Not twenty minutes before, he had left her with jesting words. And now he had gone down to depths where her presence could not move him, He was battling with some dread enemy she could not help him to overthrow. He had not her finely-strung nature. nor her sensitiveness. He could not know her suffering.

Nor could he, despite his years of contact with the social world, face it as bravely as she. Conscience — the thing he had mocked at always, as the heritage of fools and babes, was awake at last. Henceforth he was to know no rest. Henceforth the woman who had been his guiding star was to be his torture. He approached her several times during the course of that long evening, his moroseness supplanted then by a gayety too exuberant to be natural. Did he think to deceive her? She

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answered him, jest for jest, smile for smile, but once, as he stood leaning carelessly against the wall, he raised his eyes to see her passing, not ten feet away from him. A gentleman was talking to her eagerly, she listening. He caught the swift glance that sought him, and read its message ere the lids drooped. His fingers clenched. Strong man that he was, he could have screamed aloud — for he knew that she was suffering, through him and for him. He could stand it no longer. After a few minutes he went to where she sat with Aunt Joan, fanning herself languidly. Ethel, too, stood beside her, and it was to Ethel that he addressed his first words:

“You are enjoying yourself?” he asked pleasantly.

“Asking a country milkmaid if she’s enjoying herself,” said the girl, merrily. “What a question, Cousin Randolph.”

“You will be vexed if you have to come home?” he said. “Or you — Dorothy —”

His wife rose, putting her hand on his arm, her lips trembling.

“Oh, let us go — do let us go, Randolph,” she said in a low voice. “Let us go home at once.”

Aunt Joan nodded disapprovingly.

“Leave Ethel here. I shall stop with her on my way, later,” she began. “Such an hour! You will spoil Randolph, my dear niece, giving in to his every whim like this.”

Dorothy’s fingers tightened nervously on her husband’s arm.

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"I am satisfied to be spoiled," he said, laughing. "If you care to stay, Ethel —"

"No, no," cried the girl. "Not without Dorothy. I could not enjoy myself without Dorothy."

Aunt Joan raised her eyebrows. Really! Such *gaucherie*! But Ethel was absolutely unconcerned whether Aunt Joan approved or disapproved. The three went away together.

"It is only a slight headache," said Randolph Carew to his wife, when they were seated in their carriage. She knew the words were meant for Ethel's ears, yet she could not bring herself to reply. Both were silent after that, and Ethel missed the bright conversation that generally enlivened such moments. Being a girl of great tact, she knew that differences are apt to rise even between people who love each other as dearly as these two. So she said good night at once when they reached home, and retired. Dorothy's maid was waiting for her mistress when she reached her room.

"Go to Miss Ethel," she said, "and after that to bed. I shall not need you."

She stood before her mirror unclasping from her white throat the necklace that had been her husband's wedding gift. She held the shining stones in her hands, slipping them one after the other, between her fingers, abstractedly. She was waiting for him — thinking that perhaps he had some explanation to make. Surely that had been his intention in coming home so early. Surely he would not let a whole night pass—

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Oh, he loved her — he must love her. He had shown it in a thousand ways. And he knew how it must be with her now — he knew she must be suffering. He would come to her — no matter what he had to say, knowing that she would help him — that her great affection would stand any test. She turned toward the door that led into his room, expectantly. That was his step — surely that was his step —

But she was mistaken. It seemed to her that she waited a long, long while before the fear struck her that he did not intend to come. She could not realize it at first. She banished the very thought of it. But conviction grew with every passing moment. How swiftly the hour went. A whole hour!

He did not choose to tell her, then. It must be he was not quite prepared. To-morrow, she told herself, with a sorrowful smile. She must wait until to-morrow. She must not expect too much — she must not annoy him. If he needed her, would he not come to her now? . . . She must be brave and patient. He would not hurt her so, willingly. It was because he did not know she was waiting. Men do not always need a woman's counsel.

* * * * *

And if ever Randolph Carew had need of her it was at that moment, with but the space of a room between them. He was lying prone upon his bed, his eyes wild and gleaming, staring straight upward through the darkness. For the past had come back to haunt him, and with its shadow on his soul he dared not approach

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her. Above all things he must keep his guilty secret from her gaze, until such time as it was known to all the world. Above all else she must never learn — from his lips — of that unexpiated crime.

He had no leisure to reproach himself — no plans to make for the future. His thoughts were all of her and for her. How secure he had been! What would she do? She was not like others. What would she say? How would she take it?

She would get over it, he said at last, grimly. Women always get over such things. Other women had. Why not she?

“And there is my way out.” The sound of his own voice in the silent darkness startled him. He sat up and crossed the room to his dresser, the sense of touch guiding him. He groped within the little cabinet on top for a few moments; a spring clicked, and his fingers tightened about the object that was concealed within it. He shut the little door again. Yes, his way out was still there.

He could think better in the dark, he told himself, going back again and sitting down on the side of the bed. He had ample time to think, for sleep refused to visit him. All night he lay, half-dressed, his eyes wide, his brain a turbulent, maddening thing. He was glad of the gray dawn when it came, and yet he hated it. Another problem to face — what should he do with that day — what should he say to Dorothy? How could he meet her? That was the question. How could he meet her, feel her eyes upon his face, and give no sign?

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He was always last at table — he could never learn to be punctual, he told his wife often, since his education had begun too late in life. But this morning he was downstairs before the breakfast hour, and stood at the window, looking out into the street. He did not show any signs of the mental stress he had been enduring for the last six hours, so that Ethel Lorimer noticed nothing. Dorothy came in quietly, surprised to see him. She knew he had left his room a half hour before, but she had imagined he would not stay in to breakfast. He heard her enter, and, taking his courage in both hands, turned to greet her. Her pallor made him suddenly furious.

“What have you done to yourself?” he asked, almost savagely. What right had she to look like that? What cause had she to worry? If she knew the truth — then might be time.

“Am I pale?” She lifted her heavy eyes to his face, and smiled. “I can’t help it, Randolph. Late hours do not agree with me. Look at Ethel for rosy cheeks. Good morning, country cousin!”

She moved to her place at the table, and her husband’s gaze followed her gloomily. He was biting at his under lip.

“Why can’t I lie to her?” he asked himself, miserably. “Six months ago — four months ago, I could. A lie then would have been the least — nothing. I *must*. It is for her sake as well as mine. I can not have her go on like this — it will kill her.”

Aloud he said:

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"Have you been out this morning, Ethel, to get that color in your face?"

"Of course I have. Such a splendid walk! New York isn't half bad if one gets up early enough. Let me look at the papers first, won't you, Randolph," she went on, as he sat down and unfolded his napkin. "I am dying to discover how Mrs. Carew and her lovely cousin looked last night. They'll have us in, won't they, Dolly?"

"Miss Conceit!" said Randolph Carew. "Lovely cousin, indeed!"

But he gave her the paper, watching her eager face with interest. "She thinks this is Wentworth, Dorothy, where every coat of paint on a fence is chronicled."

"Well, Wentworth isn't worse than other towns," declared Ethel, stoutly. "And if the coat of paint is pink, they don't call it yellow."

"No one said they were color-blind," said Randolph Carew, smiling.

"No? Some of your New York reporters must be, then. And I'm not conceited — it's curiosity — ever since that first time when I woke up and found that your horrid old papers called me a dashing brunette. A dashing brunette! We don't make mistakes like that in Wentworth!" She looked at him with sparkling eyes, and he laughed.

"Do I resemble a dashing brunette? That wasn't the worst, either. They described my gown. Yellow satin! When Dolly and I spent a whole week picking out my pretty pink silk."

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"The last straw," said Dorothy.

"Oh, I see the allusion to color-blindness," said Randolph Carew.

"They've been half-way decent lately. I really exist now. But I still remember that first awful shock. Lordy!"

"It was a shame," said Dorothy.

"My poor pink silk!" went on the girl. "I'll never forget it. I'm afraid I cried over that. Now, even if they think Dolly the only one in the world, they pay more attention to me. Out of respect, I suppose," she went on, slowly. Something had caught her attention on the first page as she opened it out, and she paused to read it. "It must be out of respect," she repeated.

"You have never found what you're looking for on the front sheet!" said Randolph Carew.

"Your coffee will be cold," said Dorothy. "Put the paper down, Ethel. You can read all about it after breakfast."

Ethel looked up, bewildered, pushing her plate away from her with trembling fingers. She had learned, now that she visited Dorothy so often, that she must not betray emotion before the servants, so she struggled bravely with tears that threatened to overcome her.

"You may go, Sallie," said Mrs. Carew. Scarcely waiting for the girl to leave the room, she turned to her cousin, anxiously.

"Ethel, what is it? What is the matter?"

"Oh, it is such a cruel lie, Dorothy! Such an in-

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famous, horrible lie!" The tears were streaming down her face, and her bosom was heaving. "Oh, Cousin Randolph, read it." She threw the paper toward him, hastily. "Our Donald, Dorothy! Our own Donald! And they say such things of him! It's horrible, horrible!"

She was sobbing bitterly.

"It's a mistake," she went on. "It's surely some of your horrid reporters getting things mixed up again. Our Donald never could have done such a thing! And to Uncle William! No one will believe it, not if every newspaper in the whole world printed it! There ought to be a punishment for people who write and publish such dreadful lies!"

Dorothy got up and went to her husband's side, leaning over his shoulder, too disturbed by Ethel's excited speech to notice the pallor of his face, the nervous trembling of his hands. She gave a gasp as her eyes fell on the staring headlines.

"Our Donald!" she said. "Oh, Randolph! They say it is our Donald!"

* * * * *

To go back to the previous evening, when we left Donald Mackenzie seated in the Turkish corner of the Carew mansion. He knew that Dorothy and her husband had left the house together—he heard Ethel Lorimer's voice upon the stairs, and it brought him back to Wentworth, to the happiness he had known there, to the happiness he had dreamed would be his forever there.

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But not until the sound of the carriage wheels announced Dorothy's departure, did he leave the sheltering drapery that had hidden him from her sight. Even then he needed time to recover himself.

"The gentleman inside is not to be disturbed," Randolph Carew had said in a curt tone to his butler. "In about ten minutes, however, you can go in to ask him if he wants anything."

These orders left the servant in a somewhat muddled condition. He waited impatiently for the ten minutes to elapse; then, with a low cough to herald his entrance, he stood, impassive of face, and stolid as a block of wood, inside the door.

"Beg pardon, sir."

Donald, standing now with one elbow on the wide mantel, did not hear him. He coughed again.

"Beg pardon, sir."

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Do you need anything, sir? Mr. Carew told me to ask —"

"Thank you; I want nothing. Nothing at all."

"Very well, sir."

He withdrew reluctantly. He did not care much for the appearance of the visitor, even though he was evidently a gentleman. But he had followed his instructions; more than that no man could do.

And Donald stood alone again, trying to collect his scattered thoughts, his mind wandering to that half-forgotten scene, when he and the detective, Knox, had

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gone to the Criterion. He saw once more the pale, worried countenance of George Wyndon, and the handsome man who had spoken those mysterious words to him. He could never forget that face. He could never forget that voice. Never.

Felix Dunbar! Felix Dunbar! He put his hands to his head, and held it, for it was like to burst with throbbing. Why had his evil fate tempted him to come here — for this, for this above all things? Why had he recognized the man — and why had that man so tacitly acknowledged his guilt? Why had he not lied to him, brazened it out, laughed at him, taken him by the throat in anger and choked him — ay, killed him? Anything, so long as this dreadful horror that was making him sick from head to foot could be spared him.

Ah! Donald knew why he had not lied, nor jested, nor grown angry, nor raised his hand in passion. And how she loved him! How Dorothy Wentworth — good John Wentworth's daughter — loved the man who was her husband. A love to send any man through the world on his knees for very gratitude. Measuring her love by his own big heart, Donald Mackenzie knew.

"Thank God I found it out," said the poor fellow, brokenly. "Thank God! Would my hand dare to show him to her in baser colors because he yielded to temptation before she came into his life? Can I judge any man who has not had her father for his own? Who knows what I might be to-day had not John Wentworth taken me into his home?"

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"If I saw him — that time — five months ago when he came," he muttered. "I would have known then, I would have been able to prevent the marriage. . . .

"But would I — with Dorothy's happiness at stake?

"Was ever man so tortured? And this is his house — her home. I can feel her presence in these rooms. I can feel the touch of her gentle hands. I can hear her voice, when he spoke to her. I can see the shrinking figure, when he repulsed her. When — he — repulsed — her! And that was my Dorothy! Oh, God help you, dear, God help you."

He muttered the words. Over and over he muttered them. A feeling of suffocation swept through his frame. He stumbled to the chair on which he had placed his hat and coat, took them up, and went into the hall. Simmons, waiting still, opened the door for him to pass out. Donald did not speak to him, did not notice him. He was like a man in a stupor. He went down the steps, walking as he had walked that afternoon five months ago when Dorothy's hand had taken the cup of happiness from his lips; shrunken, with the gait of an aged man. The alertness had left his body; his feet dragged upon the pavement.

The street was dark and quiet, and the soft dew was falling — the odorous, warm dew of a September night, still languorous with the breath of summer. The occasional rumble of a carriage, the brisk step of a pedestrian — no other sounds disturbed the silence. Two blocks farther east were noise and bustle enough. It

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was not to seek either that Donald turned toward Broadway, but because he did not know or care where he was going. He reached the brilliant avenue at last; the dazzling glare of light hurt his eyes, and he half shut them. The cars rushed past him, and their clanging bells annoyed him, for his head was aching. Once a swiftly moving vehicle, dashing out of the semi-darkness of a side street, almost ran him down. Donald, escaping as if by a miracle, went on his way, heedless of the volley of abuse that the frightened coachman sent after his stumbling form.

At last he stopped, trying to think clearly — and the burden of his thoughts was Dorothy. He could think of no one but Dorothy! What could he do? Wyndon, an innocent man, under suspicion! He himself accusing another innocent man of the crime, telling William Wentworth to send Knox on a wild-goose chase across the ocean. And the guilty one was Dorothy's husband.

The horror of the knowledge, the dread of the future, for her sake, overwhelmed him once more.

"What shall I do?" he groaned aloud. "God in heaven, show me what I am to do."

If he could but forget. If he could but go back to where he had been an hour before and steal away then from all the world, where none might ever see him, where the thing that he had learned to-night might never touch his life — or hers.

He looked up with a dawning sense of consciousness, realizing that, as if led by fate, he stood outside the door

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of the Criterion Theater. The sight of it startled him. Once again the meaning of that scene returned to him — and once again he told himself that it was Dorothy's husband — trying to find, somewhere in his heart, a voice that would protest against it. But no voice came.

"What shall I do?" he said aloud, not questioningly, but with the ring of helplessness in his accents. "For Dorothy's sake, what shall I do?"

As if in answer to the words, a man stepped up behind him, looked at him keenly, put his hand upon his arm.

"You're wanted," he said.

Donald stared, not comprehending.

"Wanted?" he echoed.

"At headquarters," said the man. "You know me, I guess. I'm Knox."

"Knox?"

"Oh, that's all right," said the detective, smiling. "It's taken me a pretty long time, but I've got you now. Just where I want you, too, Mr. Felix Dunbar. And before morning we'll send your precious confederate, George Wyndon — poor innocent! — to keep you company."

Donald staggered a little. Not because he did not understand, but because, as if by a flash of lightning, the way had been revealed to him. Here was the answer to his prayer — here was Dorothy's salvation. He would think of nothing but that — the rest would come. Let what might befall. He saw what he could do for her dear sake.

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And that was the story that brought the tears to Ethel Lorimer's eyes; that startled Dorothy Carew; and that made Randolph Carew clutch at the printed sheet with trembling fingers and distended eyes. For the prisoner, whose capture was due to the shrewdness and unfailing perseverance of Philemon Knox, maintained absolute silence concerning the crime of which he was accused — a silence that would convict him, said the detective triumphantly. There were three columns of it, and the pictures of Randolph Carew and his beautiful wife were given, with that of their guilty relative in the center. A scandal in high life it was called, and the reporter who "found" it made the most of his luck, setting it forth dressed in flowery speech.

Mr. Knox deserved great credit. He had once more demonstrated the fact that New York City had the most wonderful Secret Service department in the world.

CHAPTER XVI

A CONFESSION

No event of the year created such a sensation as the story of Donald Mackenzie's crime, told in graphic speech by one of the "finest detectives in the world." George Wyndon, released from prison on bail — he was detained only two hours — went home, sore at heart and unbelieving. But Donald, immured in the absolute silence he had imposed upon himself, was left to think what thoughts were his in solitude. And swift as trains could carry them, came Professor Wentworth and his wife and Father Preston, to solve, if they could, the mystery of this terrible thing that had befallen their boy.

They might as well have stayed at home. He would have none of them. Day after day passed, and all they saw of Donald was a penciled note which begged them, if they had pity in their hearts, to keep away from him now until all was over. He must suffer, he told them, and he would suffer alone. Above all things he would ask good John Wentworth not to visit him. He would redeem himself, sometime; sometime he would prove himself worthy of the man who had been his second father.

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But if this note seemed almost to admit his guilt, to those who knew Donald it spoke of mystery. The Professor threw it from him in anger. Who knew if his boy had written it? No one on earth could keep him from Donald. For Donald's own sake he must see him — was he not his son by ties of love — the strongest ties in the world?

So, after much endeavor, he got as far as the cell door, and was permitted to stand outside the grating and peer in upon him. The cold corridors, the plain, white-washed cell with its low, bare cot, struck horror to the old man's heart. But what touched him more bitterly still was the stretch of the figure upon the cot — the figure that lay with its face toward the wall, a position that was habitual to it. Professor Wentworth clasped the iron bars, a sob breaking in his throat.

"Laddie!" he called, "my laddie!"

At the sound of that well-loved tone, the figure on the pallet seemed to grow more rigid. But it did not move.

"Won't you speak to me, laddie?" went on the dear old voice pleadingly. "Come, boy, jump up and let me see your face. I'm hungering for a sight of it — I have not seen it in so long."

Still no movement to show that the prostrate man could hear.

"And they would tell me you did wrong," went on the Professor, huskily. "They would say you have done this thing, my Donald, because you will not speak. Lad, don't you remember when I brought you home, a little

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homeless, motherless, fatherless bairn? For the sake of what you have been to me, my son, my son, come — let me look at you. Explain to me.”

“For Dorothy’s sake!” whispered the aching heart upon the pallet, to strengthen his weakening purpose at the tears in this broken voice. “For Dorothy’s sake!”

“Ah, well, then, come to me,” pleaded the old man. “Come up here to me and say nothing, Donald. My heart is breaking for you. Give me your hand if you will not let me see your face — just your hand, that I may feel it, and know it is really you who will not listen to me.” He could not speak for the pain in his throat — the words hurt him.

“Am I not your father? Even if you are guilty, Don, need you fear, or be shamed before me? Who can love you more than I? By my love for you, laddie, come.”

It was useless. The keeper, standing near the stately old man, whose form was shaking now with grief, moved down the corridor out of sight of a sorrow too sacred for human eyes, his own eyes dim. The tears came again, hardened as he was to suffering, when John Wentworth turned away from the cell door at last, a look of heart-break on his face, his white head bowed.

* * * * *

William Wentworth, surprised, shocked beyond measure, had no choice left him, he said, but to believe what Donald Mackenzie’s silence inferred. He said this angrily. He was not given to much sentiment; had Donald denied the charge he would have moved heaven and

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earth to clear him. Donald did not deny the charge. Donald, by his refusal to deny it, admitted it, and he resolved, grimly, that Donald, who had deceived him to his very eyes, should suffer the penalty. In vain John Wentworth pleaded. In vain he told him that Donald must be crazy. Uncle William would not listen — not even to Dorothy herself, whom he loved.

And so a week passed. The lawyers who were sent to defend the prisoner retired almost in despair. What could they do with or for the white-faced, solemn, obdurate man, who sat with his chin on his hand, staring at them, and refusing to say a word? They would plead insanity, they told John Wentworth. It was the only thing left for them to do. And John Wentworth knew that these shrewd men were convinced of Donald's guilt. Yet he never failed him; he would not believe it; none of them believed it; they sent him everything they could think of that might cheer his solitude — books, magazines, fruit, flowers, delicacies of all sorts. He tried to read, but his brain had arrived at that stage where it refused to be distracted. The flowers, reminding him of happier things, drove him to madness. So he went back to his old position — lying upon his cot, with his face turned toward the wall, and the warden said that the man would never come to trial — that he would be insane before the day of trial came.

At the end of the week Dorothy's husband visited him. He secured by some magic power what the Professor could not — entrance for a few minutes into the prisoner's

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cell. The two men did not exchange a word when they came face to face. Donald sat upon the edge of his pallet, staring at Randolph Carew with wide black eyes, and knew that he was not suffering alone. Randolph Carew, gazing back again, saw the white hair threading the raven locks above the sunken, hollow temples of the man who bore upon him the shame of another's crime.

"Am I a dog that I should do this thing?" he asked, in a strident voice.

Donald started, sprang to his feet with a bound, clasping the other's arm in vise-like grip.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Shall I be shamed by two? Am I not shamed every time she turns her pure eyes on me now?"

"Ah!" said Donald, between his teeth. "You would kill her, then? What do I care for you? What are you to me? Nothing — save that I shield you because Dorothy, my sister, is your wife."

"It will soon be forgotten," said Carew. "She has never cared much for — people. She will go back to her home, and will find happiness again — complete happiness than I could ever give her. There is a way out — for me. You are a man," he straightened himself. "You are a man — you know what way I mean."

"I know but one," said Donald, contemptuously. "The coward's way."

"Cowardice? Yes, some people call it that. Opinions differ. It will be the bravest deed of my life. I have made all arrangements — even now the truth is

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being scattered broadcast. In a little while you will hear the extras." He spoke almost airily. "Oh, how she will scorn me, repudiate me, shrink from me! Then — the end. At least then she will forgive me; she has a tender heart. And you will have your chance — the chance I robbed you of. Not yet, of course, not yet," as Donald shrank from him in horror. "A year or two, perhaps — or even a little longer. It is the price I must pay."

The smile seemed frozen on his cold lips.

"I thank you for what you are trying to do — even though it is not for my sake," he went on, earnestly. "I thank you for letting me know how high a man may rise because he loves a woman and trusts in God. There is neither love nor trust for me — now. Death will be the least of evils." He turned toward the cell door.

"Wait, wait," pleaded Donald, desperately, holding him. "Listen to me. Cast yourself on her mercy first of all — you do not know Dorothy. You do not know how she loves you. Listen," he cried again, as Carew shook him off. "Tell her first, I beg of you. How little you know her, how little you know Dorothy!"

"I realize that," said Carew, gently. "It is for her sake — for Dorothy's sake. Good-by, my friend."

And so he passed from the young man's sight, leaving him with his face pressed against the gratings, begging of him to come back — to listen. But Randolph Carew would not.

Does it seem a strange thing to say that never had temptation assailed Donald so bitterly as at this moment?

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Strong of heart indeed, and strong of mind and body, as his bearing of this ordeal proved, all — heart, mind, and frame — were weakened by the strain of these seven days and nights of misery. He stood in the center of the small compartment, his hands clenched, his bosom heaving. He knew what Carew meant. Dorothy would sorrow a long while — Many years — But afterwards?

The breath choked in his throat, with an inarticulate, gurgling sound.

Afterwards —

“God have pity,” he said, in the stress of his man’s strong soul. “God have pity. Give me a clean heart, give me a clean heart. Purge it so as by fire, but do not let me think of this.”

And God did have pity. After a while the glare left his eyes, his fingers relaxed. He went to the little pallet and stretched himself once more upon it — not to brood, staring at the white wall with unseeing eyes, but to fall into a sleep, dreamless and peaceful, in which all sorrow and struggle were forgotten.

Meanwhile Randolph Carew left the prison that held the man accused of his crime, and, jumping upon the nearest car, rode uptown. Walking in the direction of his house, he met several he knew, who stopped to talk to him, offering their sympathy at the affliction that had befallen the beautiful Mrs. Carew. He thanked them, assuring them of the young man’s innocence in spite of the odds against him; events would transpire before long that would prove the truth of what he said. Donald

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Mackenzie was simply a young Quixote trying to shield a man whom he called his friend. There was a huge surprise in store for the general public.

By this time he had reached his own door. He did not flinch from the ordeal in store, but went into the parlor at once, fully prepared for all that was now to come. The Professor was there, and Dorothy's mother, whose eyes were swollen and red with weeping; Father Preston, Ethel, and Dorothy herself, with the pale, sad face they thought she wore because of Donald, when indeed she had a deeper sorrow. The week just passed had not lightened it any.

She came to greet her husband when he entered.

"Well, dear? You have news?"

"Yes. I saw Donald."

"You — saw Donald!" The Professor jumped to his feet in consternation. Randolph Carew put out his hand.

"Yes, sir," he said quietly. "I have something to say to all of you — if you will listen."

They looked at him wonderingly — Dorothy with puzzled eyes.

"Donald is not guilty. I think we were all sure of that?"

There was a chorus of assent.

"He is suffering for another — trying to have himself convicted to save another man — a man who does not deserve his mercy and who never will."

They were plainly mystified. He slipped his hand into

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his pocket and took from it a folded paper. As he straightened it out they saw that it was covered with close, fine writing. Then he drew a chair toward him and sat down, looking about him for one instant.

"I have a little story to read — so strange and queer that it will seem like fiction," he began. "But it will not bore you, that I promise. You will listen to it, for Donald's sake?"

They nodded. For Donald's sake! Words to conjure with! Father Preston, keen reader of men, bent forward. He did not like the look that seemed to flit over Randolph Carew's face as if from behind a mask, nor the flash of his eyes, nor the curve of his lips.

"Once upon a time," said Carew, reading in a finely modulated voice — "there was born into the world a man whom people were kind enough to call a favorite of fortune. Many gifts had been bestowed upon him, but of these, save one, we shall not speak. This one was evil if put to evil purposes, and it was the power men call hypnotism. It developed early in his life, and by study and practice he perfected it.

"He was wealthy. The prospects seemed that he would be wealthier. But prospects are not stable things on which to build a future, and in his case proved a veritable house of cards — so that, arriving at a certain period in his life, he foresaw that in a short while the end of things would come for him, in the guise of poverty. The end of things, for he was merely a drone in the busy hive of men and women.

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"He met, just then, a certain girl with whom he had the temerity to fall in love. He lost her, apparently for all time, and he grew reckless, caring little what became of him. He had no religious training — I suppose it is scarcely necessary to add that. And it was while in this reckless mood that a great opportunity came to him. A certain sum of money invested in a certain enterprise would mean, within half a year, unbounded wealth. But he had no capital. Where to get it?

"The means presented itself.

"William Wentworth, the president of the —th National, was his personal friend. While dining with him one evening at their club, the talk turned upon robberies in general and robberies in particular, that had been committed in the past. William Wentworth expressed the hope that nothing would happen the consignment that he expected from the Treasury the next day.

"A simple speech enough, and harmless. After it the subject was changed.

"But it had left the germs of thought behind it. How or when the idea first struck the man he could not tell. It seemed to him a huge joke, a daring joke. He knew George Wyndon, though unknown to him. George Wyndon, above all others, was the man whom William Wentworth trusted, and he would be able to put his fingers on this money now.. And George Wyndon had been marked as an easy victim to hypnotic influence on several occasions. That was why he remembered him so well.

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"A thing like this was much better done in the open than secretly — for when one tries to hide anything there is always some loophole left unguarded. So on the evening of the day that the money reached the bank, he went, without disguise, to George Wyndon's home. The man was asleep. He woke him, told him he was needed, and the two went forth together."

"The dastard!" said Professor Wentworth, in a low voice. Randolph Carew smiled.

"From much laxity of law in one's personal attitude toward the world arises a thoroughly unmoral attitude toward the order that makes for law," went on the even tones. "The right or the wrong of this thing did not — incredible as it may seem — did not worry this man's mind. Evil consequences to George Wyndon were possible, not probable. When they befell him it was time to question conscience.

"From its very daring, the success of the scheme was almost a foregone conclusion. George Wyndon was but an instrument to play upon. Not an obstacle presented itself.

"In the period of his obedience to another's will Wyndon knew that other as Felix Dunbar —"

"The butler — Joan's butler," said Professor Wentworth.

"No," said Carew.

"He knew that other as Felix Dunbar," he repeated — "a name which was the first one thought of, and which suited as well as any other. For the only time in his life,

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perhaps, Wyndon bent his knowledge to base uses. This was not his fault, of course — he was simply a human tool. Afterwards, when this other found out that his scheme really worked, that the money was actually put into his hands without question or demur, he was delighted. Too delighted to remember a few details.

“The first and foremost of these was that Wyndon had heard the name, Felix Dunbar, before he came under hypnotic influence. He was apt at any moment to remember it in the hue and cry there would surely be raised after the lost money. So it was necessary to erase that name from the cells of memory. It was done in the conversation that Donald Mackenzie, luckily or unluckily, overheard. Wyndon had had no intention of entering the theater that evening. But there is such a thing as suggestion. Any physician will explain it.

“Another unfortunate detail was that somewhere upon the homeward way the man had lost a sapphire cuff button, left him by his stepfather, who had valued the stones highly as class reminiscences, having had them made in conjunction with a fellow-student. The loss of a button even as valuable as this could scarcely be deplored on such a momentous occasion. He had another made at once by an expert jeweler, giving the name of Felix Dunbar, and his stopping-place as the Hotel Lincoln. The button was not heard of again until the facts of its finding and its tracing were related in connection with Donald Mackenzie’s apprehension.

“It seemed as if the enormous sum was a bagatelle to

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the bank that had lost it. Not a word was said about it, there was nothing in the papers concerning it. The man, making his investment as advised, found that the purloined wealth developed wonderful money-making power. Every dollar of it seemed to possess a lucky quality. And such good fortune was had with it, and so much more made with it, that the man who was using it — let us say temporarily? — fully intended to restore it at some future time to its original owner, with many thanks. Which will prove that he was rather an extraordinary thief."

Randolph Carew ceased reading, folded up the sheets carelessly, and threw them on the table, looking about him at their perplexed, interested faces. Not one of them seemed to understand, except Father Preston. He leaned back now, feeling himself the spectator of a tragedy, watching the chief mover in the drama with the eyes of a man who has studied human nature and not forgotten the lesson.

"Is — that all?" asked Dorothy, in a puzzled voice.

"That is all I care to read."

"But we do not understand. You said Donald was shielding another. What has Donald to do with this? What has Donald to do with the man who committed this crime? What is he to him?"

Professor Wentworth put the question in a high, shrill voice. Fear gripped his heart, fear of what he saw in Randolph Carew's face.

"Nothing," answered Carew.

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"Donald would not ruin his own good name and drag our good name to earth for a stranger," said Mrs. Wentworth now. "If you know who this man is, tell us."

"The paper is signed and witnessed," said Randolph Carew.

Professor Wentworth picked it up.

"You did not read it all," he said hoarsely. "Here is another paragraph which states that Donald Mackenzie is shouldering a crime of which he is entirely innocent, for —"

He put his hand to his forehead, staggering a little. Dorothy turned to her husband.

"You know?" she said. "You know? Tell me." She held out her hands. "I can bear it from you, Randolph."

Randolph Carew rose to his feet.

"Why should I conceal it? The paper is signed with my name — and Donald Mackenzie is in prison for me. I alone am guilty. There is no one else." He looked at them, smiling, at the mother, at Ethel, at the Professor, at the priest watching him steadily from under contracted brows. But not at Dorothy. He addressed her without glancing at her.

"Your brother — I believe you call him that, Mrs. Carew — is in prison for your husband's crime. He begged of me to let him suffer for it, but a thief can have some honor. Even now every newspaper has received a copy of that confession — which is very complete, if you care to read further than I did. Your Uncle William

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also. I do not ask forgiveness." He drew himself erect. "I do not ask you to be lenient in your attitude toward me. I ask nothing at your hands — not one of you. You will remember that?" His tones were cool indeed — he might have been discussing the most trivial of subjects. "If I have done what might be called a grievous wrong, condemn me. At least, I will not let another suffer for it. The louder you condemn, the more I shall rejoice. I could never bear to be least in anything — not even least in villainy. Make me out a great rogue or none at all."

Sorrow, regret, the plea that he had been tempted, would have turned their hearts toward him then. Pity for the erring was their creed. But his insolence, the laugh with which he concluded his last words, sent a chill of aversion through them. Professor Wentworth, with clenched fists resting on the table, stood staring at the man who had taken his beloved child away from him — to bring her to this. Ethel Lorimer had covered her face with her hands. The lids had fallen over Dorothy's eyes. She was standing close to him, and as he went on speaking, her fingers clutched for support at the edge of the chair nearest her, her body swaying helplessly. Her silence compelled his attention. He turned to her, and the priest, watching, saw the mask fall from the debonair face at last, and could not bear the sight — turning his own eyes away for very pity. He could not look unmoved upon the despair of this man's heart.

And Randolph Carew made one step toward her,

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but drew back again, the cold perspiration starting from his forehead as he resisted the temptation to touch her. Then his voice smote the air, a hoarse, thick voice — a voice not one of them in that room had ever heard before. And he spoke — not to father, or to mother, but to the priest himself.

“As you are a man of God,” said the voice. “Take care of her.”

There was no other sound. The carpet deadened his hasty footsteps. Her father came to where she stood helpless, and took her in his arms. She rested her body against him, unresisting, unable to comprehend the extent of the blow that had fallen upon her.

CHAPTER XVII

ACCOMPLISHMENT

THE silence in the room lasted what seemed a long time. There was only one point of interest — the white-faced woman whose head rested upon her father's breast. They looked at her — wondering how to comfort her, what to say to her, the four who loved her well.

It was an awful silence. The mother felt that it was her place, also, to stand at Dorothy's side, to put her arms about her, to show her that she, too, was there to console her. But she could not rise — could only stare in helplessness at that white face, hoping she knew nothing, that blessed unconsciousness might claim her — for a while at least.

'Not a breath stirred the room. Then, at last, the girl moved and sighed, and her eyes flared open, meeting her father's pitying gaze, but going beyond it to where she had last looked upon her husband. He was no longer there. A tremor shook her. She struggled from her father's arms, gazing about the room wildly.

"Randolph!" she whispered. "Randolph —"

"He is gone, dear," said the father, soothingly, trying to draw her back to the shelter of his embrace. But she resisted him.

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"Gone, gone — where?"

They did not know what she meant. They stared at her — then at one another.

"Gone! He has not left the house! You did not let him leave the house —"

They could not answer her — for they had taken no notice of him; their whole concern had been for Dorothy. She did not wait, but turned her white face from them, steadying her nervous limbs a little, moving toward the door. Her father looked at her with questioning eyes — then seemed to divine her purpose. He grasped her arm firmly and drew her back, placing himself directly in her path. His fine old face was black with sudden wrath — his eyes ablaze.

"Girl!" he said. "Are you mad? What do you mean to do?"

She shrank away from him — afraid, for the first time in her life, of her father, clasping her hands at her breast nervously, and looking at him with piteous eyes.

"I am going to my husband," she said.

"You are going to your husband!" His voice shook with the rage that convulsed him. "Going to your husband! Not while I stand here, a living man, to prevent you. Your husband, forsooth! A blackleg, a scoundrel, a self-confessed thief!" The veins stood out upon his forehead in purple cords, and the crimson flag of shame mounted Dorothy's white face.

"Ah, father —"

"You have no husband. Henceforth he is dead to

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you — henceforth his name shall be forgotten — as a thing such as he deserves to be forgotten —”

Dorothy gave a little cry, the cry of one wounded to the heart. The mother rose to her feet, weeping.

“John, John!” she said. “John — has she not borne enough —”

The father would not release his daughter’s arm. She pulled at it with all her strength.

“And you would go to *that*,” he said. “You would —”

“Father, he is my husband —”

“And I tell you —”

She gave up struggling; her face hardened.

“He is my husband,” she said. “Let me go, father.”

John Wentworth’s voice was thick. “Not until you come to your senses. Not until you realize that you are my daughter, and a Wentworth —”

“Father Preston!” she turned to the priest, holding out her free hand. The breath came in quick gasps from her heaving throat. “Come, I appeal to you — father’s judgment is blinded now — he does not know what he is doing. I appeal to you. My mission!” she cried. “Every moment is precious. Do you think I do not know my husband? Speak, speak — as you stand in God’s place, speak! My mission, Father!” Her voice was almost a scream of agony.

“Let Dorothy do as she will, John Wentworth,” came Father Preston’s grave tones. “It is her right.”

But her words had brought her father to himself — it scarcely needed the priest’s voice or gesture. He freed

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her arm and turned from her, realizing that he had no daughter; that it is God's will a woman should leave all and cling to her husband. It was a bitter moment. Yet Dorothy had no thought for him. Impelled by the fear that seemed to lend her wings, she ran from the parlor and up the stairs. They heard her racing feet, they heard the opening and shutting of a door, and after that silence.

It was an ugly way, this way out, but the only way, thought Randolph Carew, as he went quietly up to the room where he would probably see the last of life. He had been very happy in this room — very happy. It was unfortunate that it had to end so soon. Three months was so short a time to hold the best part of a man's existence.

The future — Yes, there was a future. It would not do to let his mind dwell upon it. Eternal damnation, and he chose it. Oh, the daring, the pitiful weakness of the soul that defies Almighty God!

He walked quickly to the dressing-table, and drawing out the little cabinet slipped his hand inside the secret recess. When his fingers appeared again they held a shining revolver. He balanced it on his palm and looked at it. A smile curved his lips — a smile that would have been hard to read. He bent forward a little, catching sight, in the mirror, of that ugly smile. It was not such a bad-looking face, now. His fingers touched the cold barrel of the revolver. Would men be afraid of him — afterward? Would Dorothy —

He shook off the thought of her. He must not think of

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her. He needed all his nerve, and to keep it Dorothy must not enter his mind.

Cowardice, Donald Mackenzie had called it. Well, if it were not for her sake, he would stay and face it. But to condemn her to be tied to him — a thing he scorned, and loathed for life, until death separated them —

That was it. Death could separate them, and death should. Where was the cowardice in that? Donald Mackenzie did not know that it was the bravest act of which he had ever been capable.

But even as he thought this thing, he saw, in the mirror, that the door was opening slowly. He had forgotten to lock it. A frown of annoyance crossed his forehead — who could this be? He drew up the corner of the dresser-cover and threw it over the revolver. Turning then, he saw his wife.

She shut the door behind her, and stood bracing her slight figure against it, as if to gain strength for her shaking limbs, trying to recover breath.

“You wish to see me?” he asked, in a strained voice.

She did not answer him. She was biting her lips, clenching her nails into her palms, trying to keep her senses by what bodily pain she could inflict upon herself.

“I would like to be alone for a quarter of an hour,” said her husband, again. “If you will allow me. At the end of that time I will listen to anything you have to say.”

She did not speak; instead, she moved across the room

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toward him. She put her hand upon his arm, and then, extending the other hand, drew away the cloth, exposing the revolver.

"That is your way out?" she said, in a low voice.
"That is the way out — for you?"

"What if it is?"

"Oh, coward, coward!"

He winced.

"Be reasonable," he said.

"Reasonable?" she cried. The soul of her, shaken by the conflict of this last hour, spoke from her flashing eyes. She lifted the revolver in her hand, and slipped it into the soft laces at her throat. At another time she would have been horribly afraid of it. But now she felt no fear.

"It is loaded. You may discharge it — you will hurt yourself," he burst forth involuntarily.

He did not know the woman who looked at him.

"By your own confession you stand before your wife a perjurer, a thief — and now a coward," she said.
"Randolph, my husband, could you not have trusted me?"

"Trusted —?"

"Did I marry you for this?" she went on, in her brave young voice. "Did I marry you for these?" She tore the gleaming rings from her fingers and threw them at his feet. "Did I marry you for luxury, or for the life of pleasure against which I have been beating out my heart — it seems to me a hundred years — in vain?"

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Did I marry you that I might be pampered and indulged and taken care of and shut out of all your troubles and temptations—like this? You have said you loved me—”

“Dorothy —”

“Loved me! And I have propped up my aching heart with thoughts of that time when you and I should go away — together, where none might ever see us but those who loved us for what we are, and not for what we were, not for the pleasure that our wealth afforded them. Some day, some glorious day, when you were tired of all this,” she waved her hand about her, “you would come to me and tell me you wanted no more of it —”

“Dorothy!” The man’s voice was a moan of agony.

“When freedom would be ours,” she went on. “Free to think our thoughts, free to do good deeds, to expiate what sins we might have weakly committed, to —”

“Dorothy! O God, Dorothy!” He fell on his knees before her, clasping her dress. “Hate me, despise me, scorn me! Have I not given you cause? Spurn me from your feet — but do not talk to me like this! Let me go, Dorothy,” he implored. “When you turn your eyes on me you shrivel my wicked soul. Dorothy, for God’s sake, let me go.”

“Where?” she asked gently. “Where, Randolph?”

“My own way,” he muttered. “What place have I in your life? You will soon forget — you must forget. It will be so easy —”

“Come,” she said, divinest pity on her face. “Come, my husband. Have I loved in vain? Have I given my

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life to you that you might fail me? Randolph, you would have destroyed your soul — but your soul is mine. The right to it is mine. I demand it, in the name of that God who gave it to my keeping the day you married me. My husband, my husband,” her voice was a thread of melody, “come up to me. Let me feel your arms about me. Ah, Randolph, let me help you, and, in return, help me. I need you, dear — and surely you need my love?”

He listened, stupefied, his head bowed upon her dress.

“Will you not rise?” she asked, more piteously still. “Come to me, my husband, and tell me you will be mine once more, absolutely, with no mocking world between us. That though it may despise you, I am here to love you. Ah, my dear, my dear, men have committed wickeder things than you. Christ is merciful. He has pardoned worse —”

He sprang up, his face convulsed.

“Let me look at you,” he said. “Woman, are you lying? Give me your eyes — for in them I can read your soul — and if — you — are — lying — Dorothy, my wife, my wife — Oh, no, I can not. I am not worthy — I dare not look —”

He turned his face away from her, his form shaken with the sobs that rent his whole frame, and stood with his back toward her. She stretched out her hands, imploringly.

“I have been shut away from you so long — a whole week now,” she said, the low voice cutting into him like a knife. “Won’t you take me back and let me help you?”

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Oh, Randolph, you men are so strong — that is why you dare do these awful things, without thought of consequence — Let me help you, dear! Let us bear the consequences together, for, indeed, indeed, I love you.”

Through the pain that was rending her whole figure now, his sobs came, making the agony unbearable.

“Oh!” she said, faintly. “I beg of you, Randolph, I beg of you — Please, please —”

He caught her in his arms and crushed her slight, lace-robed figure to him, and kissed her. Not passionately, but with a reverence, an awe unspeakable. And then he stood with her arms about his neck, clasping him.

“Dorothy,” he said, in a trembling voice. “Oh, my Dorothy! Since the day we were married I have done my best to clean my soul. Since that day I have wronged no man. For God’s sake, believe me.”

“I do,” she breathed.

“I wanted to take my way out, sweetheart. And I wanted you to hate me, despise me, so that afterwards — So that Donald, afterwards —”

“Donald!” she said. “Donald! oh, never, never, Randolph —”

“Child,” he said, imploringly, “how can you love me —”

She smiled.

“How? Because God has willed it so. Because I want to bring you to Him. Because my love is only a shadow of the great love He has for you. Oh, Randolph,

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He died for you. He, Himself, came here on earth to die for you."

Her moment had come — she read it in his face. The words she had prayed that God might put upon her lips came, too — the right words.

"Show me," he said. "Show me the way. Bring me out into that light where you and Donald stand. Teach me, Dorothy, as they teach little children. See, at your bidding, I shall forget the past and learn my future from your lips, my wife, Dorothy."

So her mission was accomplished. Through an hour of trial that had been like years, she had won the soul of Randolph Carew. They did not stand together on a height, as she had proudly thought to do, looking down upon a world of infidelity, scorning it. No. The scorn of the world was ringing in their ears, and the sneers of it ready to assail them.

But she was glad, indeed. She held her face against his, all the brave heart of her shining from her eyes. And even as they stood there, the cries of the newsboys in the streets announced the great scandal that had been deemed worthy of a special edition.

"The heralds of my disgrace," he whispered.

"The heralds of our freedom, rather," she returned. "For we are free at last — from the past with its memories and regrets, with its temptations and its cares. We are free from doubt and question. We have come out into God's own day of faith — the perfect faith that will cast out all fear. You and I, Randolph, you and I, and the God who loves us."

CHAPTER XVIII

“AND LOVE WAS STRONG”

It was daybreak. The waste ruggedness and somber coloring of the hillsides glowed under the first delicate kiss of the rising sun. Below was a world of gray vapor, out of which the tops of the nearer pines rose as if they were growing from a phantom earth; above, the snow-capped mountains wore a diadem of gems. Still higher climbed the vaporous curtain, breaking into fleecy clouds that shut out, for one brief instant, the glistening sunlight. The azure sea of sky looked down absorbing it. There was the far-off cry of a wild animal in the forest; above the trees a hawk circled lazily.

One other sound broke the silence — the soft notes of a bell from the chapel nestling on the mountain side, announcing the moment of Consecration. Earth was alive and throbbing — the air vibrated with joy to greet the coming of the Redeemer in the Sacrament of His love.

After a little while it seemed as if there were life, too, inside the quiet chapel. Mass was ended. The priest gave his blessing to the kneeling faithful — not over forty souls in all — said the prayers, and left the altar to make ready for a ten-mile ride to the other station where he was to read Mass at nine o'clock. In a few

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moments the people began to drift out one by one. Two remained until the last, however, still kneeling. After a while the woman touched her husband's arm and they rose together.

Their stout little ponies were rested and ready for the homeward ride. The husband helped his wife to mount, and then stood, with his hand on her pony's head, looking about him.

"There is nothing like a sunrise on the mountains" he said.

"Except, perhaps, a sunseting," said Dorothy.

"I do not like the sunset," answered Randolph Carew. "It saddens me."

She looked at him thoughtfully.

"Why?" she asked.

"I dread the day when I may look at it — without you."

"Oh, that day!" She laughed, and shrugged her shoulders. "Let us start, Randolph. We can talk about that day after we have had breakfast."

"It will not take us long to reach home," he said, as he swung himself into the saddle. They rode together down the little mountain trail, drinking in the glorious air that came to them, full of life, from the gleaming peaks. Dorothy called his attention to the beauty of the rocks in the sunlight, the delicate tracery of the clouds above them, the one lone hawk circling close to earth, then wheeling away, soaring aloft until he was a mere speck in the heavens. She talked on everything and anything that might distract his thoughts, and while he answered

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her she felt that there had come thoughts to him that refused to be distracted.

“I will not evade it any longer,” she said, at last. “Why are you so sad, Randolph? It has been three days since that new furrow found its way between your eyes, and I do not like it. Tell me what I must do to take it away.”

“It will wear away. Things hurt sometimes, Dorothy.”

“Is it Donald’s letter?”

“Yes.”

“Why should it make you sad? It is all gladness.”

“But it brings bitterness.”

“Oh, Randolph! And I thought you were forgetting — at least, the bitterness. You have not talked like this in a year.”

“I know.”

“Donald will be very happy. He would not write in that strain if he were not thinking of Beatrice seriously — very seriously — And Beatrice loves him. I was sure of that long, long ago. She loved him when I knew her. Though I don’t think she thought so, herself.”

“You imagine he will be happy, then — that there is happiness for him?” eagerly.

“I really believe so. You do not mean to tell me that the thought of Donald has been worrying you?”

“He deserved you, Dorothy, not I.”

“I am the best judge of that.” She raised her face to his with a look of perfect trust. “And you did not know Beatrice.”

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“No, dear.”

“She is adorable. And now since her mother’s death — what more natural than that Donald and she should marry? Yes, and be as happy as we are —”

“As we are?” He reined in the little pony and turned to look at her. “As we are? Oh, my wife, my wife, can any man know the happiness that is mine? Or gauge it? Or think to realize it? To what heights have you brought me! The past is like a dream — a fever dream. I was on the brink of perdition when this hand of yours — this little white hand of yours — reached forth to save me. Dorothy, you found my soul — you gave it to me. How shall I repay you?”

“You have repaid me over and over.”

“Repaid you?”

“I thought that only this very morning. When you and I knelt together at the altar rail to receive the body and blood of Christ together — one in heart, in soul, in trust, in faith! Repaid! I am repaid a thousand times! Every word of yours that speaks of higher things; every single action that tells me your faith is not an idle thing — is my guerdon. I hug them to my heart greedily. And you talk of repaying me? From the very first your soul was all I asked — and what I asked, through God, you gave.”

“Through God you saved,” he whispered brokenly.

They were on the highroad that led to the small settlement wherein they had their home in this big Western country. They could see the roof of it even now —

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a roomy building, the principal ranch of the section, and the busiest — for Randolph Carew was no longer an idle man, and the Carew Farm was famous for its horses.

“You are sure it is not because father and mother are coming?” asked Dorothy at last. “You will try not to feel badly over that, Randolph?”

“No,” he said. “I did at first. I felt I could not face them. But it is part of my punishment — and, after all, am I not a new man? Have I not put aside the past? I must not be selfish, Dorothy.”

“He writes such a dear, tender letter — no one but father could write such a letter,” said Dorothy. “Ethel’s little daughter is a comfort to them — I am so glad she married David Langdon, and settled down so close to them.” She smiled, for the words brought back the memory of the past. Still, think how anxious they must be, both of them, to get a glimpse of their grandson, John Wentworth Carew.” She laughed blithely, proudly. “Four years old without a grandfather to spoil him! And when father comes, dear!”

“When he sees John on that little black pony,” said Randolph Carew, smiling.

“Mother won’t like it — she’ll think he’s apt to break his neck.”

“Break his neck! I never saw such a lad for four years old. That son of yours possesses perseverance to a marked degree, Mrs. Carew.”

“Perhaps he does — I’ve heard you say he resembles

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his mother.” She laughed, then, for she knew that the shadows were dispelled.

* * * * *

And with this let us leave them — their story is told. When God gives us clearest light, He does not touch our eyes with love, but sorrow, says the poet. So Dorothy had found it. So Dorothy had proved it. But, true to the faith that was her dearest treasure, she had not failed in the great moment of her trial, hard as it had been, and deeply as her heart was wrung by the thought of unworthiness in one to whom she had given her trust. She would not think of that, and God helped her to forget it. He brought the soul He had given her out into the glorious light of faith. He brought the man she loved to her level — than which no loving woman can ask more.

“When love is strong,
It never tarries to take heed,
Or know if its return exceed
Its gift.”

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